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SIR ROLAND.

A ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY HAL WILLIS,

Student at Law,

AUTHOR OF "CASTLE BAYNARD."

" To the hall ! to the hall !
The banquet invites ;
There music delights,
And wine crowns with transport the valorous knights."

VOL. I.



London :

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1827.

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To

My right Worthy and Excellent Friend,

J. J. McCracken,

This Romance

is

Most Faithfully Inscribed.

VOL. I.

B

INTRODUCTION.

THE musty manuscript materials from which the following Romance is compounded and composed, were neither found in an old worm-eaten chest, nor discovered neatly sewed up in the horse-hair stuffing of an ancient couch, and miraculously preserved from demolition, notwithstanding all the pressings, squeezings, and kneadings of three or four generations of round, plump, portly grandmamas, and as many prim, skinny, sharp-elbowed maiden aunts, setting aside all the boisterous rompings of the juvenile branches.

I do not wish to impose upon the ami-

able credulity of my courteous reader (if perchance I be read), setting before them such a dish of indigestible improbabilities, so daintily garnished with a thousand fancies; on the contrary, I mean to be unprecedentedly candid in avowing the means whereby I gained possession of every particle of the delectable tale hereinafter related.

Perhaps my cotemporary brother-scribblers (for I'll e'en call myself of that poor but happy fraternity) may deride my wandering from the beaten track—call it all pretension of novelty; no matter—I am an eccentric being—was born so—have lived so—and shall probably die so—and, indeed, I hate nothing worse than plodding on in the old way, and always prefer exploring a new one (be it never so entangled), even at the peril of leaving part

part of my skirts behind me, and braving the consequences of being pricked on my route by the sharp-pointed, penetrating thorns of critical and invidious animadversion.

In fine, my motion in the literary “system” is, to that of those bright luminaries whose emanations dazzle and delight the world, precisely what the comet’s is to the regular rotatory planets—not that I would have it, for a moment, imagined that I have the ostentation and unpardonable vanity to take unto myself the ideal semblance of the magnitude of that celestial courser, or to hint that the effulgent wit and lightness of my *tale* resembles the long radiant brush of that fiery orb; on the contrary, I would merely demonstrate (by a *heavenly* simile)

how much *we* resemble each other in our eccentric course.

Moreover (let it be understood), although I have a kind of “cockletop” predilection for all pieces, scraps, and morsels of antiquity, and the more especially, old black letter and mouldy sheep-skin manuscripts, it is next to impossible that I should ever go digging and groping for them among the ruins of old castles, abbeys, monasteries, or other structures of that venerable and dilapidated feature. I agree, a moss-covered, grey-looking remnant of a Gothic edifice is a vastly pretty object to look at, when peeping at you from the midst of a cluster of embowering trees; but as to venturing within its crazy walls (crumbling like a pound-cake), I have an obstinate, insurmountable objection, lest any of the *crumbs* should chance

to

to fall to my share, than which nothing could be more unpalatable to a man of my peculiar taste!

But lest I be taxed with prolixity, I will proceed, without further comment or circumlocution, to display to my reader the precise and particular manner in which I first obtained, and got possession of, the precious documents wherefrom the following delectable pages were extracted, by my unwearying diligence, aided and assisted therein by my worthy chum and croney, master Matthew Mullins, of Port-soken-Ward, chandler! into whose hands fate or fortune destined they should fall; for by that identical dealer in soap and sundries was the original MS. purchased, soiled, torn, and mildewed, in a condition capable of lighting up the pyre of enthusiasm in the cold heart of the most fasti-

dious antiquary. And happy, thrice happy, do I consider myself in the possession of that friendship, which so kindly permitted me to participate in bringing to light this important historical work, the which will (as Mullins *poetically* said) —“Shed an immortal halo round our names, and make us be remembered with delight by posterity’s posterity!”

How many cool tankards of *twopenny* have we sipped—how many pipes have we expended, during the arduous collation, arrangement, and reparation of these half-obliterated documents! and indeed the pains and *brains* the task required is not to be told: notwithstanding which candid declaration, I dare be sworn, there are those invidious mortals, who will imagine we take unto ourselves a greater portion of merit than is our due, seeing that

we

we have but “made up” a book, and not written one.

This is most true: at the same time, I would observe, with due submission, backed by my unassuming coadjutor, master Matthew Mullins, that the better (or the rather the *worst*) half of the books issued now-a-days are but mere compilations—patchworks composed of snatches and scraps from chronicles, and obscure and little-known black-letter pamphlets; whereas ours at least hath the merit of originality and genuineness; and we could, if we chose to descend to particularities, point out divers little beauties wherewith our work is gemmed, which we could, with honest confidence, claim as our own; but as master Mullins observed, with a prudential pride, which I could not but admire—“When we see the tid-bits picked

out by the critics, it will be time enough to acknowledge them; at the same time, by holding our peace, if the work be unjustly decried, we shall then be wise enough to let the secret die undivulged within our own breasts." And in this most sage and discreet conclusion, notwithstanding my love of candour and plain speaking, I quietly acquiesced, knowing full well that Matthew Mullins was deeply versed in the opinions and whimsies of mankind; although in the way of author-craft, I have not yielded so implicitly to his *ipse dixit* on every occasion, from an inward (perhaps egotistical) feeling of my own equality of judgment therein, to say no more of it.

Even to my first proposal of an introductory preface, master Matthew Mullins was decidedly averse; and he being a very diffident

diffident man, his objection was furthermore strengthened by the knowledge of my resolution, in nowise to screen from the reading public the names of the collators and illustrators, or the precise manner of discovering the MS.; Mullins being of opinion that we should be received far more agreeably by our readers, under an assumed name and title, an affectation of disguise and mystery being the present mode: while, on the other hand, I strenuously argued the weight *his* name would have amongst all honest folks, being a man of some substance, honourably acquired—well to do in the world—and, as all that knew him could faithfully testify, of passing probity and good credit.

But I was fain, at last, to yield in part to his scrupulous particularity, which made him shrink so nervously from publi-

city and popularity, by putting *my* name alone in the titlepage; at the same time positively refusing to omit it in this introduction, seeing that I should thereby take upon myself a responsibility which he was equally entitled to share, with the praise which may probably be hereafter awarded to our joint labours.

Having now, therefore, given this clear and succinct account of its discovery and production, I resign the MS. to the kind care and consideration of the reader, with the cordial wish, that it may be perused with as much gratification as the compilation afforded; and that while its better parts yield amusement, its many defects may be treated with a generous lenity.

H. W.

SIR

SIR ROLAND.

CHAPTER I.

“ UP, up, cousin Perkyn! come, rouse thee, man—dost hear?—That’s the third cock since I called thee: one would think thou dost sleep with poppies under thy nose—or art thou frozen?”

“ Frozen! no, certes,” said Perkyn, yawning, and rubbing his drowsy eyelids. “ But what makes thee so lively this morning, Ralphe?”

“ That’s but a sleepy question,” cried Ralphe; “ arouse thee, and open thine eyes, an’ thou wilt not hear the click-clack of Mabil’s tongue. By the mass! when-
ever

ever her music strikes upon mine ear, it always puts me out of tune, and makes my head go round like a whirligig!"

" Mayhap it may," said Perkyn, rising from his straw pallet, and stretching his rude-formed limbs; " but a woman's eyes, as well as a woman's tongue, may turn the head of a carl or a king."

" Thou shak'st thine ears, and look'st so very wise," replied Ralphe, " that forsooth I think thou hast some notion there, whereof 'twould be better to relieve thee."

" Thou'rt right," said Perkyn, " I have. I can see through a millstone as far as most folks—I know a hawk from a hand-saw."

" Ay, thou'rt 'cute enough—in mischief!" said Ralphe, " and can'st give a good pail, and kick it down again too."

" And thou can'st carry it, Ralphe," said Perkyn, " for such a lass as Joan."

" Joan!" exclaimed Ralphe. " Oh, oh! what, hast thou tracked me, ey? But what

what care I? for—" added he, singing and laughing—

" Folks who go slily creeping,
Like jealous and envious elves,
Do seldom get aught by their peeping,
Or hear any good o' themselves."

" Dost think, Ralphe—" cried Perkyn, the colour rising in his cheeks—and he would doubtless have given vent to his indignation, but at this juncture the dialogue of the two thralls was interrupted, as Ralphe had feared, by the shrill, screaming voice of Mabil, the spouse of the ceorl or husbandman whom they served, a blustering busy-body, a good manager of her husband and his household, whose hands laboured from early dawn to set of sun, and whose tongue was as unceasingly employed. She had passed her thirtieth year—in stature rather middling, and inclined to be lusty; and although an early marriage had made her the mother of a large family, yet she was still reckoned, among the goodwives, a neat handsome body

body—a very good neighbour, but, though no idle gossip, rather given to dilate upon trifles. Among other favourite topics, that concerning her family stood pre-eminent, and on every little squabble—and such things will occur in the best regulated families—she was sure to inform her spouse—a good, easy, quiet man, of six feet in height, and withal very slender—concerning the house and lands, and live-stock she had brought him, and of the substance and industry of her family, and the consequence her alliance had given him; but as tranquillity was his chief characteristic, and reply to these oft-repeated truths was impossible and useless, he generally beat a speedy retreat whenever this occurred.

To this excellent housewife, Ralph and Perkyn stood in the relationship of nephews; in which respect they endured more than any of the bondmen on the farm. She shewed not the least favouritism or partiality towards them, uniformly setting

setting apart the most laborious tasks for her hopeful relatives, keeping a strict eye upon them, and rating them soundly on the least appearance of idleness or waste of time. If they evinced the least dislike to obey her commands, or uttered only a murmur in opposition, she poured forth such a strain of eloquence upon the offenders, such a merry peal, that ceased not to ring in their ears for a week afterwards.—

“ I would make hardy, industrious men o’ ye,” quoth she—“ if ye would thrive, lads, in this world, ye must work and labour ; the bread and butter will not come to your mouths, and fill your bellies, if ye stand wi’ them open till doomsday ; ye are young now, and complain o’ my usage, and call it hardship, but ye will learn better by-and-by, and, I trust, will live to thank me. The sapling that is pruned and trained, will arrive to a tall, a straight, and a fruitful growth ; but let it shoot and spread its own way, and it will presently run wild and straggling, and be in the orchard

chard like a poor, idle, and despicable man, among the rich and industrious."

The youths listened to her arguments in silence, yet not exactly convinced of their truth, or the necessity there was of enforcing her maxims so rigorously ; but a word in reply on their part, would, they were convinced, be only the means of adding to their difficulties ; they therefore very wisely, on every occasion, gave a tacit consent to all her eloquence, urged so forcibly.

The well-known tones of Mabil's voice had no sooner reached their ears, than every other thought but instant obedience to her hasty summons, was banished from their unsophisticated minds ; and flying towards the extreme end of the hayloft, which served them for a commodious dormitory, they descended the ladder in a trice, and, without daring to cast their eyes towards Mabil, they ran to their horses, and began to harness them.

" Ralph — Perkyn — lads," quoth the good

good woman, eagerly, but in a gentle, milder tone than she ordinarily used, when she had the trouble to come and arouse them—"haste ye, and harness the beasts, and lead 'em to the yard; there's a gentle come to an accident, a worthy, well-spoken man, of some degree too, I warrant—we may sell one o' the beasts to advantage, lads; he promises fair, there'll be no stickling or bating for a shilling or twain; take a wisp, and rub 'em down. When the apples fall, let us hold out our hands—harvest comes but once a-year, and he's a fool who doth not reap when he may. I've a large family, lads, and must look after the penny, ye know—rub down their flanks—take the besom to their legs—comb their tails and manes—quick—so—they look comely—now, put on their halters—well done. Come, bring 'em quickly to the yard. Lord! an' it were not for me, I know not what would become of my poor family; an' I had not been up
wi'

wi' the lark, now mayhap I should ha miss'd o' this good fortin."

Followed by Ralph and Perkyn leading the beasts, the loquacious and provident goodwife Mabil, walked and talked all the way to the house. The lads' curiosity had been greatly excited by her important, yet unintelligible communication, but they endeavoured in vain to glean any information from her discourse, which indeed principally ran upon her own excellent foresight and management, interlarded with vague hints of an occurrence they could not comprehend, but which was certainly to produce some benefit to her family.

On arriving at the house, however, the mystery was soon elucidated. A stranger had been riding rapidly towards the farm to inquire his road of Mabil, when just as he arrived at the gate, his jaded and weary beast sunk under him, and expired on the spot, casting him off, and occasioning him not only discomfiture, but

several

several severe bruises. But when he discovered that his horse had really died of excessive fatigue, he seemed to forget all corporeal suffering, and with much earnestness begged the good woman to inform him where he could instantly procure another, or else obtain him one, offering to reward her handsomely for her pains, as business of the most vital importance urged him to resume his journey without the least delay. With the greatest alacrity the goodwife promised to supply the wants of the generous and courteous stranger, who spoke so indifferently of money, and appeared so well able to pay ; and the manner in which she so diligently and good-humouredly executed his commands, we have already related.

The stranger was impatiently walking to and fro before the house, awaiting her arrival; his pace was sometimes quick, then slow and irregular, apparently actuated by the impulse of his passing thoughts, and care and anxiety were legibly

bly written on his wrinkled brow. He was of a fair complexion, but yet there was extraordinary paleness visible; his hair and beard were light, his eyes of the brightest blue, his nose aquiline, and the whole cast of his features noble, and evidently the remains of a peculiarly handsome countenance ; in figure he was erect and commanding, though not what is generally termed tall. He was enveloped in a large brown cloak, guarded with fur, a trim cap, ornamented with a black plume ; and on his feet he wore a pair of loose Spanish leather boots, armed with sharp pointed spurs.

The moment he saw Mabil advancing, he walked towards her with long hasty strides—“ Hast thou succeeded, good woman, in procuring me a steed ?” said he.

“ Yes, sir stranger,” replied she, bobbing a courtesy, and the countenance of the traveller brightened at the welcome intelligence ; “ they are hard by, just at my heels, coming now round the house.

I have

I have brought two for a choice, and fine beasts they be, used to hard work, but in good condition ; for I take heed neither man or beast is idle on our farm; plenty o' victuals, plenty o' work, as my husband says. A large family needs many things, and God knows I labour hard enough to procure them."

The good woman's harangue was here fortunately cut short by the approach of Ralphe and Perkyn with the horses, which being both tolerably good ones, in this case of necessity one was speedily fixed upon by the stranger, who, with the assistance of the young men, immediately stripped the fallen horse of his trappings, and transposed them to the back of the other.

All this was performed, to the great surprise of Mabil, without any mention of the pecuniary satisfaction she was to receive ; to suppose that he wished to take possession of the horse without remuneration, was impossible ; but she knew something

something of the world, and had heard, though she had indeed suffered very little, by its roguery ; where no payment was intended, she was aware there was seldom any haggling about the price, and large promises generally ended in little profits.

Therefore, maturely deliberating upon all these things, and taking into consideration the interests of her family, she no longer permitted her delicacy to overcome her desire of gain, and advancing to the stranger, who she thought really intended to mount—"Pardon, sir stranger," said she, courtesying before him, and effectually preventing his approach to the horse without walking over her, "we have not as yet settled for the price—mayhap——"

"Right—right, good woman," said he, smiling at her earnestness, for it was impossible to be offended at her caution, "in my haste I had forgotten, but we shall not quarrel about the purchase."

"No, I dare be sworn we shall not, sir stranger,"

stranger," replied she, reassured by the manner in which he spoke.

"By St. Peter!" exclaimed the stranger, suddenly, with a tone and look that startled Mabil, "I have certainly lost my bourse—how unfortunate! yes—yes, 'tis gone," continued he, searching in vain for it about his person; "well, no matter; thou wilt lend me the horse, good woman, I trust; and in a few days, when I have executed the commission which now urges me on so pressingly, I will, on mine honour, return and reward thee tenfold for the loan."

The colour in Mabil's cheeks assumed a deeper hue; she hesitated, and knew not what to reply to this request. She was a very good-natured woman, and felt for the trepidation and anxiety of the traveller, but a horse was a thing of too much value, she thought, to lend on the honour of a total stranger. He read her thoughts, and fearing a refusal, he became angered at her delay.—"Do not hesitate,"

said he, biting his lips, “ I must have the horse; this dilatoriness may prove my ruin. Fear not, woman, I will keep my word.”

“ Ralphe—Perkyn,” screamed Mabil, seeing it was his intention to mount, “ hold the horse for your lives—he shall not go.”

“ Slaves,” cried the stranger, in a resolute tone, “ I would not willingly harm ye, but anger me not by resistance, or perchance ye may rue it: hereafter I will reward ye. Surely ye do not take me for a spoiler, that would deprive ye unlawfully of the beast?”

Ralphe, however, who had his suspicions, which were moreover increased by the exclamations of Mabil, paid no attention to the stranger, but jumping across the horse, was about to ride away with him; yet notwithstanding his alertness, the traveller perceived his intention, and drawing his sword, rushed forward and seized the bridle.—“ What, sir knave!”

cried

cried the stranger, in a rage, belabouring Ralphe with the flat side of his sword.— “Wilt thou dismount, or I will break every bone in thy skin. Dismount, wilt thou not?” and he continued to beat him, while Perkyn interposing his body in defence of his cousin, was instantly struck to the ground by the powerful arm of the stranger.

Meantime the affrighted Mabil, beholding this enraged and obstreperous conduct, began to bawl most lustily for goodman Brisset, her spouse, who came running from the house in the greatest alarm. He was a tall, thin, meagre figure, and there was certainly nothing very fascinating in his exterior, as his head was diminutive, and by no means proportionate to the dimensions of his body, though his small features were well embrowned by exposure to the sun; his black hair was lank and uncombed, hanging down his shoulders; and his whole appearance plainly denoted that Mabil had not promoted

the fortunes of goodman Brisset for his beauty, but rather for his utility, as he was hardworking, honest, and withal docile as a child ; and indeed he had more the semblance of an overgrown boy than a man of forty.

“ Help — murther — help !” screamed Mabil, and — “ Help — help !—goodman Brisset !” roared both the lads on his appearance.

“ What’s the matter ?” demanded Brisset, who had only just quitted his pallet, and was hardly awake.

“ Matter !” repeated Mabil, whose indignation was aroused by his apathy—“ dost not see the lads are being murthered ! run, sirrah, and take off that desperate—shew thyself a man.”

His interference was however happily needless, for the moment he made his appearance, the stranger desisted, and sheathing his weapon, turned towards him.

The youths attributed this sudden behaviour on the part of their assailant, to
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the fear of their master's vengeance, for he was a man who could handle both sword and pike, and had been in many skirmishes under the valiant lord from whom he held the lands he cultivated, from which he had always come off without loss of blood or honour; but when they observed the stranger sheath his weapon, and approach their master, they could only marvel at his audacity.

"Brisset!" exclaimed the stranger, gazing upon the ceorl, "do I hear aright—is it William Brisset whom I see?"

"I am William Brisset!" replied the other, regarding him with extreme agitation—"I am, and thou art——"

"Enough!" said the stranger, frowning, and motioning him to be silent. "'Tis a good chance that hath sent thee hither at this moment when I require thine aid—bid those knaves resign the steed. My word, I doubt not, will be a sufficient pledge to William Brisset for my return."

Brisset bowed obedience to his com-

mands; and leading the horse by the bridle, with the greatest humility assisted the traveller to mount, who, whispering a few words in his ear, waved his hand, and was out of sight in a moment.

Mabil stood a wondering spectator of this incomprehensible scene, which had the miraculous effect of silencing her indefatigable tongue; in fact, she was afraid to interrupt their dialogue, lest she should bring upon herself the anger of the impetuous stranger, which she had witnessed was not to be done with impunity. But the moment his departure relieved her from this fear, she asked fifty questions, so rapidly following upon each other, that she gave her spouse no opportunity of answering any.

William Brisset was a true Spartan in his speech, a habit arising more probably from necessity than choice, and therefore at one glance perceiving that to satisfy her curiosity as to the name and condition of the stranger, was the sole purpose of her inquiries,

inquiries, he answered her in the following succinct and comprehensive manner.—“ He is a knight of high degree ; I have met him in the field ; he once befriended me when I was in jeopardy. He'll return the horse.”

CHAPTER II.

THE dark shades of a November evening were fast closing around, and a dense heavy fog floating in thick clouds over the land, presented a most cheerless and unwelcome prospect. The peasant sought his humble hut, where the crackling and hissing of the logs on the blazing hearth cheered his honest heart, and imparted a glowing and genial appearance of comfort to his lowly dwelling. The lowing of cattle, the bleating of flocks returning to the fold, and the baying of dogs, all gave

an intimation that the hour of repose was rapidly approaching—when through the yellow mist might be imperfectly distinguished the figures of the stranger and his weary beast, toiling up the steep road which led to the ancient city of Old Sarum, or Salisburie, whose noble castle and fair fortifications covered the summit of a high hill, at the foot of which ran a double entrenchment, and a deep dyke, forming an excellent defence.

There was much rejoicing, pleasantry, and mirth, within the ancient walls; for Roger, bishop of Salisburie, being then vicegerent to king Henry (the first of that name), who had gone over into Normandy, there were divers of the nobility of England, and their retainers, sojourning there. The respect paid to the favourite, in the absence of his royal master, was profound; for the bishop was known to bear great sway with the king, and the smiles of such a man were worthy a courtier's wooing: in his regard there was

certain

certain preferment and dignities to be won, and ambitious hope flourished in the sunshine of his favour.

The present high and honourable station which he held, arose from one of those wonderful freaks, with which fortune delights to surprise mankind. While Henry was travelling in Normandy, he happened to enter the church where Roger, then a poor parish priest, was performing mass; his impressive manner, his clear and distinct delivery, and the great care and simplicity with which he went through the whole service, attracted the attention of the prince—who had at that time, however, no prospect of mounting the throne—and so much was he pleased with the propriety of Roger's conduct, that he expressed his wish that he would become his chaplain. The priest was much surprised, yet not less gratified, at this offer of preferment from so noble a prince, and, as may be supposed, required but little solicitation and entreaty to embrace his offer: he was

not gifted with much learning, and indeed very few, even of the religious order, could boast any pretensions to erudition in those unenlightened days ; but his natural quickness and ability amply supplied this defect in his education : he was also of a pliant, docile, and yielding disposition, an even temper, possessed of vast discernment, and withal so good a courtier, that he failed not speedily to win the confidence and affection of his royal patron. The latter continually loaded him with the munificent marks of his favour, and lastly, upon coming to the crown, bestowed upon him the bishoprick of Salisburie, from the emoluments of which he derived a large revenue, which was, moreover, augmented by the numerous presents he daily received from those who wished to flatter or ask some boon of the favourite ; and by these means he was now become one of the wealthiest subjects in England. Increase of fortune, however, did not increase his pride ; he still, at least outwardly,

ly, bore that appearance of humility and simplicity which had so fortuitously raised him to his present grandeur; the mildness and suavity of his behaviour to all manner of men, of high or low degree, was ever the same; in denial of, as in granting a favour, his speech was equally agreeable, and conciliated even those who were disappointed. That he was fond of wealth and power, there is little doubt, for the quantity of money and jewels he amassed was immense; but it is also true that he expended large sums in building castles and houses in different parts of England: yet it was obvious he could not possibly enjoy all the noble structures he had caused to be erected; nor could it be for the benefit of his heirs, for he had none; it was therefore generally thought to be a mark of his vanity and ambition, to perpetuate his memory, and carry down his name to posterity, as the founder of those noble edifices.

The stranger now entered the gates of

the city, and dismounting, led his horse; for the narrow streets were so thronged with people passing from house to house, where the several noblemen and knights had taken up their dwellings, that he found it extremely difficult and tedious, in his present apparent haste, to penetrate the crowd; the obscurity of the evening rendering it still more perplexing, as the improvement of lighting the streets, even in the greatest cities, was then unknown; and, with the exception of now and then a solitary torch, borne in the hand of some vassal, who was leading the steed his lord bestrode, and which momentarily glared red in the fog as they passed along, and dazzling his eyes, left him in a worse predicament, no object was visible.

The persons of whom he inquired in his route, however, instantly directed him to the bishop's residence, which he evinced the greatest anxiety to reach. Having at length arrived at the desired spot, he begged the vassals who were on duty at the portal

portal to admit him without delay to the presence of their lord, as he wished to impart to him something of the utmost importance.

"I fear me, sir knight," said the man whom he addressed, "my lord hath even now retired to his chamber; his noble guests have all departed hence, since—"

"No matter," replied the stranger, impatiently, "I must see him; affairs that will brook no delay demand I should commune with him. Here, take this signet, and bear thou my bidding fearlessly, as thou shalt harmlessly; no blame shall fall on thee in this proceeding."

There was something so commanding and assured in the stranger knight, that the vassal no longer hesitated to comply with his request, but taking the offered signet, bowed and departed. The remaining vassals promptly offered their services to the traveller, who resigned his horse to their care, with the strictest injunctions to provide him with every thing needful

in

in his present galled and jaded condition ; and awaiting the return of the messenger, he seated himself on an oaken bench by the hearth, his large and fair eyes fixed on vacancy, and his brow contracted and heavy with thought.

This apartment, standing on the right hand when entering the stupendous oaken gates, which were richly carved and adorned with cherubims' heads and ornamental floresc work, fitting the residence of so rich a subject, was built entirely of wood ; its plain, smooth walls, hung round with pikes, morions, targets, and various implements of warfare, its floor laid with broad red tiles ; and the massy girders and bold rafters, blackened with smoke, forming its rude roof and ceiling all in one, gave the whole an appearance of unpolished substantiality ; while, through a large aperture in the roof, serving the purpose of more modern and convenient chimnies, the white curling smoke from the well-piled hearth freely escaped. On
the

the floor of the lodge, or guard-room, lay five or six vassals, stretched at full length upon their straw pallets, ready accoutred to relieve the guard, and enjoying the interval in sound and refreshing sleep.

In the course of a few minutes, though the tedious time appeared an age in the calculation of the impatient stranger, the vassal made his appearance, and having communicated his lord's courteous compliance with his request, conducted him across the spacious court to the chamber where the bishop awaited him, who, with that politeness which ever characterized him, met and embraced him at the door.

“A hearty welcome and true, to Hubert de Lacy,” said the bishop, “both for thine own sake, and for those, dear to my heart, from whom, I trust, thou bring’st glad tidings;” and leading the knight by the hand, he seated him beside himself on a couch.—“Say,” continued he, “how fares his grace, and the good prince Stephen,

Stephen, and all our friends in Normandy?"

"It grieves me sore to say," replied Hubert de Lacy, sighing, while the firmness of his regards, which he directed full upon the venerable countenance of the bishop, exhibited no signs of the sorrow his tongue expressed, "that our beloved king is troubled with such malady, that I fear me (though all the saints avert the blow!) it will go nigh to baffle the skill of his leeches."

"Now God's will be done!" said the bishop, fervently, yet evidently moved at these tidings: "but truly, I trust, good De Lacy, his friends' fears do magnify his danger. King Henry, though he hath seen full threescore years, I wot doth inherit a goodly constitution, the which he hath not weakened by intemperance; his moderation and abstemiousness have always been remarkable, shewing a good example to many of his nobles, who I am shamed to say, needed, yet ne'er felt the inclination

tion to follow it. But tell me, sir knight, how came this sad malady upon his grace? was it excited by fatigue, or did it come i' the air like the deadly blight, which ever blasts and withers the noblest trees with its pestiferous breath?"

" Much I fear me, my lord," said De Lacy, " the cause of this sad effect arose rather from undue irritation of the mind —the more sensitive part—than the body. Report says, though his grace is silent, and keeps the secret fast locked and rankling in his own breast, that he had some difference with his son-in-law, the earle of Anjou ; and that Maude too o'er-stepped the bounds of filial duty and respect so far, as to abuse her royal sire, taking part against him with her lord. This is but hearsay—this I know, as mine own ears did witness—I heard him talk of Maude, appelling her ' shrew and she-devil,' and such other terms, as plainly evinced she had displeased him most unpardonably."

" I would

“ I would this were not true !” said the bishop ; “ ‘tis sad to quarrel with one’s kindred, nor doth his grace deserve this usage at her hands—she whom his care and policy hath raised, with so much love and goodness, to fortune and command. But, alas ! from her childhood I have noted in that dame a proud and querulous disposition, capricious and overbearing, more willing to command and be obeyed in fear, than take the pains to win with mildness and sweet persuasion, such as should ever dwell on woman’s lip—’tis a sad truth, yet in truth must it be spoken.”

As the bishop concluded, the eyes of Hubert de Lacy were illumined with a pleasure he could not conceal, and his brows relaxed from the anxiety which before contracted them.—“ And shall this proud dame !” exclaimed he, “ Plantagenet’s wife, and withal married in a foreign land, be raised to England’s throne—where woman never yet hath sat, and bear capricious sway o’er England’s nobles ?

My

My lord," continued he, grasping the bishop's hand, " I trust I do not err; I think—I hope prince Stephen can boast a friend—a partisan in the good bishop of Salisburie."

" All good men," said the bishop, cautiously, " shall find a friend in me; nor can I do otherwise than esteem the nephew and favourite of my good and gracious liege."

" True, true," said De Lacy, biting his lips, and visibly chagrined at the bishop's intentional misapprehension; " I know thy universal charity, my lord; thy firm unshaken loyalty to our king, whose life may it please the Almighty to prolong; but—and human life is most uncertain—should death untimely snatch king Henry from us, would it not be policy, my lord, then to elect a successor?"

" While the king lives, sir knight," replied the bishop, solemnly, " what man dare infringe upon his just prerogative?"

" In verity, my good lord," cried Hubert

bert de Lacy, perplexed to divine the real sentiments of the bishop, yet still urged on by the interest he had at heart, to gain this man of power to aid the designs of prince Stephen, “ thou dost me wrong, and much impeach my loyalty by thy misinterpretation: nay, I would not, were it in my power, deprive our king of the least particle of his authority, even though my treachery would win me fortune, fame, and favour. But I—and well I know, my lord, thou feelest the same—am only anxious for my country’s weal ; all other lesser sentiments are centered in that one, or are but the resplendent rays of that one glory ; therefore I would, and timely so, appoint the king’s successor, solely, I do repeat, for my country’s good.”

“ I do not doubt thy zeal,” said the bishop ; “ I know thee, and thy love and predilection for the prince Stephen, who hath also much influence and favour in the eyes of all the barons. But it must be remembered, that they all have sworn, nay, e’en

e'en this noble prince himself, hath sworn to support the empress Maude's pretensions."

"Yea; most true and unanswerable, my lord, is all thou dost aver," replied De Lacy ; "these oaths were indeed demanded by a fond father, doting on his favourite child, and were as freely taken by his loyal subjects; but, grant this, my lord, they were conditional, and setting forth provisos, which the king hath broken."

"I must allow it," said the bishop.

"And cometh it not to pass most happily?" continued De Lacy ; "doth not this swerving from his promise shew us an outlet, whereby, with consciences whole, we may escape the shackles and the thralldom we have unthinkingly brought upon ourselves?"

The bishop replied not, but appeared somewhat troubled and confused ; and rising, paced the chamber in silent thought for the space of five minutes. During this tedious interval, De Lacy suffered
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the greatest anxiety and doubt, watching every movement of the bishop, and endeavouring, whenever he turned his face towards him, to penetrate his secret thoughts ; but the faint beams, which diverged from the flame of a brazen lamp, suspended from the ceiling, gave too imperfect a light for him to read in the placid countenance of the bishop, ought that was passing in his mind. It was evident however that there was a struggle in the prelate's breast, betwixt loyalty towards Henry, and his predilection in favour of Stephen, and it was considerably increased by his dislike to the empress Maude : and this wavering and weakness, trivial as it was, cheered De Lacy, who was aware that every doubt in the bishop's mind was favourable to his prince's cause.

“ Hath the bishop of Winchester communed with thee, my good lord, upon this momentous business ? ” said De Lacy, wishing to break this silence, which became irksome to him.

“ He

"He hath," replied the bishop, stopping short before the knight; "we have met."

"And had not the pious bishop's eloquence, supported by such cogent reasons, power enough to plead a brother's cause successfully?" demanded De Lacy.

"Sir knight," replied the bishop, "what the heart yields freely, needs no pressing suit for hand to give, or tongue to utter."

The countenance of De Lacy brightened at this confession.

"Heaven is my witness, I wish prince Stephen well," continued the bishop; "but to my king, my patron, the founder of my fortunes, I owe such gratitude as binds me to his slightest wish; his will is law to me, in all actions of mundane tendency, for the power I possess is but derived from him, and shall not his will govern what his will hath made? Yea, while he sojourneth in this land of trouble, I am bound to serve him, heart and hand; nor will I league with any one, however inclined thereto my heart may be, to cross his

his present purposes. When Henry is no more, reason shall then bear sway, where gratitude at present rules despotic."

Upon this delicate confession, De Lacy took the bishop's hand, and pressed it with fervour.—"I am satisfied," said he, "that my good lord doth act most prudently and most laudably; and that wisdom and policy have pointed out the course thou dost so unerringly pursue."

Having thus happily concluded the chief object of his mission, and being now, from the mutual knowledge and communication of their secret sentiments, perfectly free from all constraint, they conversed familiarly together, chiefly on topics touching the affair at issue; and after partaking of some refreshment to recruit him after the fatigue of his hasty journey, the night being far advanced, they retired to rest, De Lacy purposing to set forth again at early dawn, to give intimation to the friends of Stephen of the fears, or rather hopes, they cherished of Henry's sud-

den

den dissolution; and to hold themselves in readiness to back the bold pretensions of the prince.

Passing through Winchester on his way to Salisburie, Hubert de Lacy had already repaired to the palace of the bishop of that city, or see, but found the prelate was gone to London; to which place he immediately proceeded after his interview with the bishop of Salisburie, who faithfully promised to send trusty messengers to every part of the kingdom, to warn their faction to prepare themselves for a sudden change.

CHAPTER III.

IT was mid-day, and Ralph and Perkyn were busily employed in felling a decayed and aged elm; and the ringing of their sharp-edged axes, and the deadened sound which the hollow trunk sent forth at every blow, was echoed through the trees and the valley, in which they were diligently prosecuting their labours. The trees were leafless, and the hills were covered with snow, while the frost-spangled greensward glittered beautifully in the rays of the sun. The air was clear, cold, and bracing; but the exertions of the two lusty thralls kept them sufficiently warm to allow them to dispense with their sheep-skin jerkins, which lay beside them.

The difference betwixt these low-born youths was peculiarly striking; Perkyn was

was extremely taciturn, seldom speaking but in reply, and always heavy, absent, and brooding over his thoughts; while the broad, open, lively countenance of honest Ralphe, was ever illumined with mirthful smiles; and though his wit was coarse and uncultivated, he meant harm to no one, and was the very prototype of vulgar good-nature. Nor had the thraldom of his situation sufficient influence to dull his good-humour, or suppress the vivacity of his wit; while his merry songs, half sung, half hummed, beguiled the toil and labour of his vocation :—

“ The leaves do fall,
And strew the ground,
And twigs and all
Do here abound.
With a heigh-ho,
The frost and the snow ! ”

“ Nothing keeps the frost from nipping a man like hewing of a tree,” said Ralphe, interrupting the song which he had just commenced, and resting from his exertions

tions awhile on the implement he had been using.—“ This tree,” continued he, in a tone which might be as well mistaken for a soliloquy as an address to his fellow-labourer, “ minds me of man’s estate and fortunes.”

“ How so?” quoth Perkyn.

“ Thus,” said Ralphe.—“ But firstly, it hath the barrenness of my fortune, and the gloominess of thine; and now will I shew thee the semblance ’twixt a man and a tree. When he first cometh forth into this world, he is like a yielding twig, which may be trained and cultured to a fair tree, an the sickly blights do not nip the stripling; if he ’scape these, he waxeth strong, and groweth to a goodly height, and the greenness of his youth is his beauty and his mishap, for it attracteth the knave and the fool to harbour beneath his shadow; though truly they never take umbrage at aught he says, but smile and flatter while he shelters them. But deep-brown wisdom cometh with the autumn,

and

and the wintry winds of misfortune bear away his friends; and so from year to year he increaseth in age, and death comes in the end with his axe, and cutteth him up by the root."

"An odd vagary," said Perkyn; "and prithee what sort o' tree may'st thou be?"

"A thorn, in the side of a foe—a birch, beside a fool—an elder, with boys—an apple, with children—a pair, when I am with a good fellow, and so forth, just as the soil, the air, and my company humour me. As for thee, Perkyn, thou art a sapling, a yew-tree, or a weeping-willow!"

"Thou shalt find me tough as oak too," said Perkyn, gruffly.

"I'faith now, call me fool," cried the other, laughing, "an I have not mistaken thee; why surely now, the very roughness of thy *bark* plainly shews thee an oak!"

This sally was by no means calculated to mend the matter, and Perkyn, muttering to himself, resumed his work with

evident vexation ; and in his heart would have almost as willingly bestowed the mighty blows he hurled at the trunk, on his companion. He was naturally of a revengeful disposition, and was moreover rendered irritable and morose by the rivalry of Ralphe ; but who was really ignorant of the predilection which his cousin had for pretty Joan, whom he had happily wooed and won—by his good-humour ; and this secret jealousy rankling in the bosom of the disappointed thrall, increased the natural gloominess of his disposition, and rendered him by no means companionable to the laughter-loving Ralphe.

They had just felled the tree, when a man came riding through the valley on a fine galloway, leading another by a halter.—“ Hallo !” cried he to the thralls, “ can ye point me the route to William Brisset’s ?”

“ Certes,” replied Ralphe ; “ every crow knows his own nest, I ween :” looking at
the

the horse—"Why, I say, Perkyn, here's the beast come back again. Here's a mouthful of sunshine for us," continued he, approaching and patting the horse; "this will certainly put Mabil into a better humour; for, by the mass! the grey mare hath been fretting for the horse most grievously."

"Thy mistress, I suppose?" inquired the man.

"My mistress! lord, no—but she's my master's mistress, and in good sooth, hath the mastery of us all," replied Ralphe.—"Prithee, doth the gentle, who, with reverence be it said, was more rude than gentle, as my simple shoulders witness, and who borrowed this nag, serve thee?"

"What?" said the vassal, staring, not comprehending his meaning.

"I say," quoth Ralphe, "who serves thee?"

"Serves me?—I serve the baron de Lacy," said the vassal.

"Ay," cried Ralphe, "thou serv'st

him for a man, and he serves thee for a master, so stands it in the world's opinion; but—”

“ I pray thee, do not hold me here,” said the man, interrupting him—“ I'm in haste—I cannot lose my time in changing words with thee.”

“ Nay, keep thine own then,” said Ralphe; “ yet I marvel an thou wilt find a better market for the commodity of thy speech, seeing 'tis of so slight a texture, 'twill not bear the jack-o-lantern light of my poor wit.”

“ Come, come,” cried the vassal, “ thou hast had thy humour—direct my course now, I prithee?”

“ Ay,” said Ralphe, “ thou'rt one of those who would run to the devil with their eyes open: I would teach thee the Christian virtue of patience, but thou'rt an untoward spirit, that hath more moonshine than gumption in thy brains. Let the horse that beareth thee, who beareth the horse in thine hand, turn his nose to windward

windward over the hill, then wheel to the right, and thou'l have Brisset's hut in thine eye in a twinkling."

Without deigning reply, or thanks for this information, the man urged on the horses, and was out of sight in a minute.

"That fellow's a crab," said Ralphe, looking after the vassal, as he scoured over the hills—"I do not like him."

"Thou should'st not stand fooling with a man in haste," said Perkyn, ill-naturedly.

"He was a hasty fool to take offence, I trow," replied Ralphe; "I only wished to do him a good office; no matter—Mabil will put his patience to the proof, I warrant. Will he scowl, and pucker up his black brow at her, think'st thou? By St. Paul, I like him not! the wherefore, he hath more vinegar than oil in his tongue and his visage, which suits not my palate; he is unlike all that is likely—no, I can't like him: may he never stumble over a worse block than Ralphe!" So saying, he resumed his labour, lopping the branches

of the prostrate elm ; but unable to forget the stern and villainous look of the vassal.

The tall, lank figure of Brisset, issuing from his lowly dwelling, met the eyes of the vassal as he rode towards the spot ; and the clattering of the horse's hoofs attracted the ceorl's attention, and seeing the horseman approach, he stood still till he came up.

" Brisset !" cried the vassal, " the baron returns thy horse, his thanks, and these good pieces to boot."

" Hubert de Lacy is generous," said Brisset, accepting the gift.

" Did'st ever know him otherwise ?" demanded the vassal.

" Never," replied the ceorl.

" Thou'rt changed, Brisset, most wonderfully changed," said the vassal, dismounting, and resting one arm upon his horse, while he stedfastly regarded the ceorl, " at least in disposition. I knew thee formerly a sprightly lad; thou did'st not bear upon thy brow such gloom and melancholy—

melancholy—thy tongue ran glibly then
as mountain rill."

"In sooth, and is it so? By what name then shall I know thee?" said Brisset, surprised, and aroused from his lethargy.

"Have ten years so altered my voice, my features, and my person, that thou can't not recognise," lowering his voice to a whisper, "Nicol Arnot?"

"What!" exclaimed Brisset, starting at the sound, and turning deadly pale, "art thou Nicol Arnot?" and apparently overcome with a variety of contending emotions, he remained gazing upon the vassal, unable to utter a word; but by the fearful expression of his features, it was evident he experienced no very pleasing sensations on the renewal of an intimacy of so old an acquaintance; nor did his strange behaviour appear either very flattering or very agreeable to Nicol, who slapping him on the shoulder—"Art dumb-founded, man?" cried he. "What means this foolery?

foolery? Is this the way thou giv'st a welcome to a friend?"

"A friend!" repeated Brisset.

"Ay, a friend! likkest thou not the term?" said Nicol, frowning, "or 'complice, an' thou wilt; though what the world calls friendship, Brisset, is but a weak unstable compact compared to ours; for we hold each other's secrets in our keeping, and keeping them, we hold to life, and must perforce be faithful for our peculiar 'vantage."

"True—true," said Brisset, sighing.

"True—true!" said Nicol, repeating his words with a sneer; "why, matrimony hath made a milksop of thee, by St. Anthony! what ails thee? thou wear'st a most woe-begone countenance; what hath had power to unman thee thus? Thou wast a different man when first I knew thee."

"In truth was I," replied Brisset; "and I would I could see those days again."

"To be a slave again?—fool——"

"Nay,

" Nay, I then was free. I never knew what slavery was, till I transgressed," said Brisset, passionately; " a guilty conscience, Nicol, is more galling than the heaviest chains."

" Pshaw!" exclaimed Nicol, while a sardonic laugh gave a fiendlike expression to his dark visage; " what silly qualms are these! what have we to fear? was it so horrible a crime to expose——"

" Murder, perchance?" interrupted Brisset, shuddering—" murder, for aught we know."

" And for aught I care," added Nicol, carelessly. " Neither my hand, or thine, did the deed."

" I would I could silence the pricking o' my conscience as readily!" said Brisset.

" Think no more on't—think no more on't," said Nicol, putting his hand familiarly on Brisset's shoulder. " Many years have passed since that affair; we were mere boys—our chins had scarcely budded; we regarded it as a freak—a frolic void

void of all guile: the temptation too was enough to make stronger minds than ours yield."

" 'Twas done so hastily," said Brisset, shaking his head; " I had not time to weigh the chances in the balance of my better judgment; I was entrapped——"

" Entrapped! what mean'st thou?" said Nicol, sternly; " darest thou——? But, no——thou didst grasp the offered prize as eagerly as I, and thou hast reaped, and dost still exist upon the fruits of that unexpected harvest: and wherefore should'st thou, at this distant period, pour into mine ears thy unjust complaints, falsely accusing me of leading thee on to do that which thy avarice and thy desire of enfranchisement prompted thee to? Go to, Brisset, thou'rt too old to play the puling baby now; methought time had worn away every the smallest trace of compunction in thy breast."

" Say rather it hath nourished the bitterness

terness of my feelings, and sharpened my affliction," said Brisset.

"A weak mind is a favourable soil for the growth of such impressions," retorted Nicol, bitterly, incensed at the pusillanimity, as he termed it, of the ceorl, who was apparently acutely suffering the tormenting stings of conscience for some early crime, which the sudden appearance of Nicol his accomplice had brought fresh to his memory.

It was owing probably to this mental and nervous irritability of his mind which made him so fond of silence and solitude, and submit so tamely to the government of his loquacious spouse; and whenever the noble under whose protection he had placed himself, whose vassal he had become, called upon him to serve in the civil broils and commotions which were then of so frequent occurrence among the petty tyrants, who, jealous or fearful of each other's power and possessions, were continually flying to arms to settle their disputes,

putes, he was the first to join the warlike band with his complement of thralls; for in the confusion, noise, and pomp of war, his feelings were partially hushed, and he found repose. He was a brave, hardy, and desperate soldier, fearless of death, which could only relieve him of a burthen become intolerable to him. He was formed for a better and a happier lot, for his heart was warm and generous, and he bore goodwill to all mankind; but one false step had averted all his happiness, embittered the very summer of his life, and rendered the remnant of his days cheerless, hopeless, and unhappy.

Nicol Arnot, however, regarded him with the most profound contempt—he despised him heartily; for he who had no virtue but his daring courage to commend him, could not be conceived to have any idea of the feelings of an honest man, who had unhappily, in a moment of extraordinary temptation, swerved from the path of rectitude.

“Arnot,”

"Arnot," said Brisset to his callous and supercilious accomplice, "enter and refresh thyself; partake of the best I have, for the baron's vassal and his squire must be treated with due respect; but, mark me," continued he, with a firmness and resolution that he seldom or never evinced but upon the most extraordinary occasions—"depart hence as quickly as thou wilt, for I hate thee as I hate the fiend." His passions here seemed to overcome him, and he could only add—"Away, and never cross my path again."

Arnot was unprepared for this sudden burst of passion, and started back with astonishment at the unusual haughtiness of Brisset; while the tall erect figure of the latter, stretched to its utmost height, and the rage which kindled in his sunken eyes, seemed to defy his anger or his disobedience, and before he could recover from his surprise, Brisset had passed beyond his reach.

But notwithstanding the sincerity with
which

which Brisset had confessed his utter aversion to him, Nicol Arnot was not the man to take his hasty speech in dudgeon, and shew his contempt, by coolly departing without partaking of his ungracious offer; on the contrary, nothing could be more agreeable to his feelings, than to regale himself at the expence of an avowed enemy, who had so candidly informed him that his presence was a curse. Leading his horse therefore to the door of the hut which Brisset occupied, he tapped at the door, and it was presently opened by Mabil. Having partly gleaned her character from Ralphe, as well as had some intimation of it from the baron, he was perfectly prepared to meet her; saluting her courteously—“ Good woman!” said he, “ I am sent with many thanks to return you the horse, which the baron de Lacy, mine honoured lord, borrowed on an emergent occasion, a few days past.”

“ The baron de Lacy!” cried Mabil, holding up her hands with surprise, while
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the recollection of her over-cautious behaviour on that occasion recurred to her mind, and caused the blood to mount in her cheeks—“St. Mary, protect us!—I trust he was not offended at my foolishness: dear—dear—the baron de Lacy!—well—I said he was a noble gentleman, the moment I set eyes on him; but then travelling without vassal or varlet of any kind—”

“ Was a sufficient excuse for any suspicion on thy part,” said Arnot; “ and moreover, the baron is too good humoured to be offended at an honest woman’s tongue, whereof he hath given goodly proof, by sending thee a few pieces to repay thee for the loan, the which I have delivered to William Brisset.”

“ Oh, our lady! what a gracious noble is thy lord!” exclaimed Mabil delighted. “ Come—come in, enter, I prithee; and now thou shalt partake of what thou wilt—though heaven knows, I have a large family to provide for, and a little when

when divided is but a little; our food is coarse and homely, but thou shalt be free and welcome to eat and to drink of the best. And thou hast seen William? why didn't the fool call me, and not let thee stand in the cold all this while? come nearer the hearth," continued she, throwing some fresh fagots on the fire.

Nicol Arnot seated himself on a block, or part of the trunk of a tree, which served for a stool, and was soon served with a wooden bowl of new milk, some black bread, and some fresh eggs roasted amidst the embers on the hearth, which a long ride and the keen air of a frosty morning, rendered very palatable to a hungry traveller. Nor did the tongue of Mabil cease to amuse her guest during the homely repast her industrious hands had prepared.

CHAPTER IV.
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THE precaution which the policy of prince Stephen had prompted him to take, in giving speedy notice of king Henry's illness to his brother, the bishop of Winchester, Roger of Salisburie, and the numerous partisans his hardiness, his martial policy, gentleness, and liberality, had gained him among the nobles of England, proved of the utmost service to him in the sequel ; for, as had been apprehended, the king's malady baffled the aid of medicine, and on the first of December 1135, he departed this life, at Rouen, in Normandy.

His illness, no doubt, was occasioned by the irritation of his mind, his anger having been excited by a quarrel with the earl of Anjou and his daughter Maude, thereby

thereby predisposing his body to the slightest attack, which he thoughtlessly increased by eating a dish of lampreys, a delicacy of which he was inordinately fond, but which never agreed with him; and on this occasion his epicurean taste threw him into a dangerous fever, which cost him his life.

The breath had scarcely left his body, ere the impatient Stephen, with a few followers, bent his course towards England, well aware that diligence, where there were other competitors for the crown, would aid him more than friends, or at least strongly co-operate with their designs. But he was not so quickly in England as the intelligence of the king's demise, and he found both Dover and Canterbury fortified against him on his coming, the inhabitants regarding him as an usurper of the rights of Maude. There was moreover such a tempest of thunder and lightning on his landing, which was at Whit-sand-bay, that the people imagined the world

world was about to be at an end ; while others superstitiously prognosticated that it omened the wars and troubles which would arise in England, to oppose the ambitious Stephen, and punish him for his perjury.

The aspect of affairs was however much more favourable on his arrival in London, where he was joyfully received by his party, which being composed of the wisest and most powerful men in England, both clergy and laity, had great influence over the minds of the people, and all those who did not willingly acknowledge him, were speedily compelled to do so. The countenance of the bishops, who at that time bore great sway in England, was sufficient assurance of success to Stephen ; and those who refused to come forward and acknowledge his rights, on account of the conscientious fears they entertained of perjuring themselves, were soon absolved, by the declaration of William Curboil, archbishop of Canterbury, that the oath required

required by king Henry, and taken by the nobles, could not be considered binding, inasmuch as the English had never submitted to the government of a woman.

To strengthen this assertion, the bishop of Salisbury maintained that Henry himself had been the first to infringe upon their rights, by marrying his daughter out of the realm without the approval of the barons, thereby rendering their oath null and void, their intention having been, when they swore, only to give themselves a king of the race of William the Conqueror. And still further to eradicate any false impressions their conduct might leave on the minds of the people, Hugh Bigod, seneschal or high steward to the deceased king, coming over with Stephen to England, voluntarily swore on the holy evangelists, that Henry in his last moments disinherited his daughter, for some offence she had given him, and nominated his favourite Stephen his successor. Thus, by force

force of argument, and in many instances by the stronger argument of force, all were inclined to favour Stephen's pretensions.

The barons, already prejudiced against Maude, by reason of her haughty and overbearing disposition, readily credited the seneschal's oath, and considered it of sufficient force to palliate their disloyalty to the empress. And on St. Stephen's day, Stephen was crowned at Westminster, by William Curboil, archbishop of Canterbury, Henry, bishop of Winchester, and Roger, bishop of Salisbury.

But although he had received the crown and name of king, his title was so weak, that to win the favour and support of the barons, he was obliged to make them great promises, and grant them more privileges than they possessed under the government of the Norman kings. The bishops too, in order to hold him as much in their power as possible, swore allegiance to him only so long as he should continue to up-

hold the dignity of the church ; while the lay-lords, following the cautious example of the clergy, swore fealty to the new-made king, only on condition that he would faithfully observe the covenants with the barons, and preserve his own regal estates and honours entire. They did not, however, require his concession to their extraordinary demands with more facility than he complied, assured, that in the present emergency, it would have been the extremest folly, nay, perchance have cost him the crown, to have hesitated ; and knowing that it was easier to undo what he had done when he became king, than to refuse the slightest boon in his present dependent condition.

Immediately after the celebration of his coronation, he departed for Winchester, to take possession of the treasure of the late king, which amounted to one hundred thousand marks, besides plate and jewels ; and afterwards proceeded to meet the corpse of Henry, which, according to his

his dying commands, was to be interred in the monastery of Reading, which he himself had founded. His bowels, brains, and eyes, had been previously taken out, and buried at Rouen, where he expired, and his body filled with salt, and enveloped in ox-hides, was transported to England.

Having fulfilled these various duties, and become gradually settled in his new-born authority, king Stephen rewarded the most faithful of his followers, and with the money which he had seized, presently levied men of war out of Flanders and Brittany—a very judicious precaution, and highly necessary to counterbalance the power of the barons, and restrain their actions within proper bounds; for he was not to be deceived by the false appearance of tranquillity and outward favour, with which he was received by the far greater part of the nobility, and was resolved to hold himself prepared for any sudden ir-

ruption which the discontented might foment against him.

Among others who shared the marks of his royal favour, was the baron de Lacy, who was truly devoted to the king; for himself, he was now fifty years of age, and cared little for the advancement of his fortunes; but it was for his favourite and only son, William, that he looked forward to his future aggrandizement with the most paternal solicitude; and the ambitious views of the baron were seconded on every occasion by the not less ambitious heir of his wealth and titles.

William de Lacy was of fair and goodly favour; handsome face and features; bold, eloquent, and insinuating in his address; but withal more envious than emulous: and although he possessed too much cunning and command over his passions, to betray their evil emotions, by outward show, he was restless till he had revenged even the slightest insult, real or imaginary, upon the head of the unfortunate offender.

In

In fine, in mind the very prototype of what his father was—in person the image of what he had been in his youth; and similarity of disposition, rather than natural affection, bound them to each other.

When sojourning in London, king Stephen usually held his court at a noble tower, thence called Tower Royal, near Watling-street—a palace founded by Henry the First, well fortified, and so perfectly secure, that during the reign of Richard the Second, at the time of Wat Tyler's insurrection, when the rebels gained possession of the Tower of London, this place defied all their efforts, and remained perfectly safe; and here Stephen received and entertained the nobles, who came to pay homage, or swear fealty to their newly-elected king. The entrance into London, as well as the departure of any of the barons, who were all followed by a showy and splendid retinue of their vassals, well habited and mounted, was a pageant which drew forth the people in

crowds to gaze at; and the two bailiffs, who were then the civil governors of the city, possessing the same power and authority as the present lord mayor, as well as the chiefest and wealthiest of the citizens, gave grand entertainments and costly banquets, in celebration of the king's coronation.

Among those who were in continual attendance, Hubert de Lacy and his son William stood pre-eminent; they had attached themselves to the king, and had followed him through all his devious course, as unerringly as the faithful satellites of a planet. Whatever their motive might be, disinterested or otherwise, it was too punctilioius a point for a king to inquire; he owed much gratitude for the beneficial effects of their loyalty and promptness in his cause, and it was sufficient for him to believe them true, and to reward them accordingly. Their intercourse with the king was extremely familiar; nor were the elegant manners of the elder

elder De Lacy less agreeable to the youthful queen, than his prudence in council was estimable in the eyes of her royal spouse. And immediately Stephen was invested with the title and authority of king, he bestowed the honour of knighthood upon the younger De Lacy, which was not merely a token of his favour and an empty name, but he likewise made him a grant of some lands, which produced sufficient funds wherewith to support his new rank with proper dignity.

One morning, after giving audience to several of the nobles, Stephen was closeted with Hubert de Lacy, and engaged in confidential converse with him.— “Amid the throng that have paid their court to me this morn,” said the king, “I could readily point out one who hath more mischief in his head than loyalty in his heart. But I seldom yet did see a clear, serene, and summer’s sky, but what some envious cloud, however light, hath come and marred its purity. De Lacy, canst thou

thou divine the man my suspicions point at?"

"Ay, my good lord," replied the baron; "and with pity be it spoken, I have remarked more than one who have more stubbornness than wit: but a single patriot's breath would mock a hundred such, and wither them, making them droop like the parched and yellow leaves of autumn."

"In sooth," said the king, "this is no flattery."

"'Tis honest truth, my liege," replied the baron.

"I do believe it," said the king; "so let its wholesomeness amend its bitterness. But he whom I suspect, is greater than a troop of these, fawning and flattering now, attending proper opportunity to bite—a crafty, base-born knave!"

"Robert of Gloucester!" cried De Lacy, eagerly.

"By God's birth, the same!" exclaimed Stephen. "And hast thou too marked  
aught

aught suspicious in his speech and conduct?"

"Only inasmuch, my liege," replied the baron, "that he vaunts his loyalty in higher terms than true men do in common; speaking of more than he can do, and more, I warrant, than he wills, to do. His tongue doth assuredly belie his meaning, but in its acting, over acts its part."

"We must watch his motions with a jealous eye," said the king. "The breath of disloyalty is infectious; and among the unthinking herd, that follow a great example more from viciousness than conviction, it may breed a dangerous discontent. At present, let us shut our eyes against his faults, and meet his dissimulation with the like. The serpent shall crawl and glide along unmolested, as he believes himself unseen; but when he ope's his jaws, and exhibits his envenomed fangs, he shall find us prepared to crush him."

"And I prithee, my gracious lord, to

let this charge devolve on me; I will not slumber on the watch," said the baron.

"Be it so," said the king; "and I charge thee, make it thy chiefest care to learn his true character; unmask him, that I may read him readily; place some lynx-eyed varlet about his person—a shrewd, quick fellow, who hath just wit enough to pick up what is dropped, unheeded and fearlessly, without tagging to it any of his own wise hints and speculations."

"All which your grace urges is most just," replied De Lacy; "and without delay I will proceed in this affair, the which if I do not accomplish, to meet thy royal pleasure and approbation, it shall not be for lack of goodwill in the cause."

"I doubt it not," said Stephen: "thou hast too oft convinced me of thy trustiness, when I had nought to pay thee but my thanks, for me to harbour any fear of thy changing now. This glaive," touching the sword he wore, "adorned with jewel-led hilt and scabbard, is fair to look upon, and

and like many gay courtiers, who strut and make a dazzling shew of valour, thrown idly by when mostly wanted; but the steel that I have grasped in many feuds, I prize more highly than this fine glittering bauble. Even so, sir baron, have I tried thy temper in the time of need, and never found thee fail me."

De Lacy bowed his thanks for this flattering eulogy.

"I pray thee," continued the king, "where is thy truant son, sir William? He doth not ordinarily let so many hours pass ere he presents himself."

"Pardon him, my kind lord," said the baron; "I do believe the queen hath commanded his services this morn, and sent him on some errand."

"Oh, the gallant! Doubtless a mission of vast import," said the king, smiling; "a fair knight, truly, to execute a lady's bidding; I dare be sworn now, 'tis only to bear some idle message, or to buy some

trinket. Well, well; on his return bid him come hither."

The baron de Lacy arose, bowed, and was about to quit the presence, when the king motioned him to resume his seat.— "Tell me," said Stephen, "hast thou any kin beside this only son?"

"None, my liege," replied the baron, somewhat surprised at the abruptness of this question.

"Thou hadst a brother?—is it not so?"

"I—I—had once," replied De Lacy, betraying great emotion, "but he is long since dead."

"I have heard of him," said the king: "a noble of just estimation; mine uncle Henry did oft mention the name of Richard de Lacy as a man of valour, and spoke of him as one whom he regretted; but I could never learn how or where he died. Was he unmarried?"

These curious questions of the king appeared to bring back to De Lacy's mind the remembrance of bitter woe, and to

to rip up wounds which time had healed but partially; yet he perceived there were no means to evade relating the circumstances touching his brother's death; and although the pallid hue his features assumed, and the tremulous tone of his voice, proved that it cost him considerable pain, he obeyed.—“Richard was my elder brother,” began he; “the favourite of my father; and well he merited that distinction, for a more valiant knight never bore arms in his country's cause. Unfortunately he became enamoured of Lucie D'Orville, and secretly espoused her, conscious that the baron would not countenance an alliance so much beneath his rank and expectations; for, though the child of a brave knight, her beauty was the maiden's sole dowry. To me alone he confided the secret of his marriage, with the strictest injunction not to divulge it, nor did I ever betray the confidence he reposed in me. Happy in the fond affection of her husband, the lady Lucie lived in a secluded

ded spot, unknown to all the world—a beautiful flower blooming in the midst of a wilderness; but their uninterrupted tranquillity was unexpectedly disturbed, for Richard was suddenly called upon to accompany a mission to the French dominions. In this dilemma he committed the dame to my protection, and mourned and mourning, he departed, alone upheld by the hope of speedily returning to the arms of his adored Lucie. But alas! a few weeks after his departure, she expired in giving birth to an infant. I cannot enter into a detail of our sad, sad meeting on his return; even now, my blood runs chill when I remember his look of horror, when I communicated to him the afflicting tidings; the feeling that convulsed his whole frame, his frenzy, and his subsequent piteous melancholy. He never recovered the shock, but having assumed the cowl, died a few months afterwards of a broken heart."

“In sooth, a sad mishap,” cried the king,

king, who had listened with much interest to this succinct, but sorrowful recital; “but prithee, how fared the little pledge of their affection? thou hast not told the infant’s fate.”

“ Said I not the boy died?” said De Lacy; “ yes, my gracious lord, the infant shared the fate of its unhappy parents.”

## CHAPTER V.

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IT was spring-tide; the bleak blast had given way to the warm and renovating breeze, and the icicles had long since fallen from the eaves of the thatch and the leafless boughs; the fleecy snow had sunk into the earth, and exposed the verdure of hill and dale to the invigorating influence of the mild rays of the sun; and the whole feathery race were flitting to and fro, from bough to bough, expressing their

their delight by their sprightly chirping; while the bright green budding of the trees gave an unequalled and almost indescribable freshness and beauty to the scene.

It was at this delightful season of the year, when smiling nature wears so youthful an appearance, that Raynard and Colbrande, two vassals pertaining to Baldwyn de Redvers, earl of Oxford, were busily employed in casting their net in the river, and having moored their boat in the midst of the stream, awaited patiently for a draught, wiling away the time in chatting and singing.—“By St. Olave,” exclaimed Raynard, suddenly stopping in his song, and casting his eyes towards the banks, “an there be not that crazy-pated, wandering carl, the Black Boy, as they call him! I have not set eyes on him some months bygone—I thought he were dead.”

“Peradventure ‘tis his wraith, Raynard,” said Colbrande. “The poor fool’s certainly casting his eyes at us,” added he, looking towards him.

He

He whom they called the Black Boy was sitting crosslegged close to the water's edge, with both his hands on his knees, gazing at the vassals, and intently observing their motions. He was of a dark and swarthy complexion, but peculiarly well made and muscular, his skin so effectually embrowned by continual exposure to the sun, that it exhibited the colour of an Indian's, while his black, curly hair, and short round beard, indicated a superior strength, and gave a ferocity to his visage, which was heightened by his wild black eyes. His habiliments consisted only of two garments; a pair of dark blue woollen drawers, which only reached half way down his thighs, and an old worn-out sheepskin jerkin; but neither cap, bonnet, shoes, or sandals, protected his head or his feet. He appeared far different from what the exclamation of Raynard would lead one to suppose, for he was about five or six and twenty years of age; but he had received the cognomen of .

of the Black *Boy* when young, and it was probable he would bear no other name if he attained the age of a centenarian.

“I’ll play a joke upon yon crack-brain,” said Raynard—“I’ll shew thee some sport, Colbrande, I warrant me.”

“Have a care, comrade,” said Colbrande, in a dissuasive tone, “it may prove no sport mayhap; he’s not to be jeered or flouted at—he’s a tetchy, cross-grained carl. It’s ill playing with the devil’s imp.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” cried Raynard, laughing at his fears, “what a dolorous phiz thou makest, man! By the mass, look not in the stream, or thou’lt be frightened at thine own face. Fish, man, keep quiet, and thou shalt have the divertisement at my cost.” So saying, he took a small piece of cheese and some black bread from a kind of scrip which was slung at his side—“Hollo, Gervase!—hollo, boy!” shouted he, holding them up to view, “wilt take a nuncheon?”

The

The Black Boy expressed his willingness to accept the offer by nodding, and shewing at the same time a set of teeth of exquisite whiteness and regularity.

“ Come along, then,” said Raynard, beckoning to him; “ doff thy jerkin, lad, and swim; art afeard of wetting thee? or dost think I’ll leave my net to come to thee?”

The keen appetite of Gervase being whetted by the exhibition of the food the vassal proffered, he required no farther solicitation, but casting aside his sheep-skin covering, plunged into the river without more ado, and swam towards them.

“ How the dog swims!” said Raynard, chuckling; “ I doubt not but he’s thinking of what a relish he’ll have.”

“ Wilt thou give him nothing then?” asked Colbrande.

“ Not I,” replied Raynard; “ why that’s the joke, dost see? Let him drink what

what he likes, but he shall have nothing to eat."

Colbrande would have remonstrated with him, more through fear than compassion, but the Black Boy at this moment reached the side of their boat, and prevented farther parley. Supporting himself with one hand upon the boat, he held out the other for his share.

"Thou swim'st like a barbel, Gervase," said Raynard, pretending not to notice his extended hand, while he began to consume the bread and cheese, addressing himself between every mouthful to the expectant and hungry Gervase.—"Me-thinks the water must be devilish cold—dost not find it so? an empty stomach too: when a man hath a belly full indeed, it makes a vast difference. This cheese is passing sweet.—I tell thee, Colbrande, I know the wench that milked the ewes and made it."

During all this unconnected and frivolous discourse, Gervase remained perfectly

fectly silent and calm as the river which laved his body; but at last, perceiving that Raynard had finished his meal, and had neither offered him nor Colbrande any part of his scanty provision, he ventured to put his hand upon the vassal's knee to jog his memory; when, with the utmost *sang froid* imaginable, and regarding the Black Boy with a stupid stare of unmeaning vacuity, as if he had been just aroused from a dream.—“By the mass,” exclaimed he, “an I have not forgotten thee, Gervase! why did’st not speak?”

But he had not sufficient command of his muscles to conceal the irresistible inclination he had to smile at the success of his own unfeeling wit, and the poor fellow’s disappointment, so visible in his face. The gloom that overshadowed the Black Boy’s dark countenance vanished at the silent expression of Raynard’s glee, and fixing upon him a look fraught with rage, while his dark eyes glanced fiercely from

from beneath his long, black lashes, he muttered, in a deep, sonorous voice—

“ The tree is grown, and the branch is sprung,  
On whilk thy body shall be hung !”

and instantly diving in the stream, he arose again in a few seconds near the bank, and throwing his jerkin over his shoulders, without taking any further notice of the vassals, retreated to an adjoining thicket, and was soon lost to their view.

The vassals looked at each other for several minutes, without uttering a single word. Colbrande was certainly alarmed, and had some kind of credence in the malediction of the Black Boy; but as for Raynard, he was one of those hardy, fearless souls, who would face a whole legion of devils, with his satanic majesty at the head of them, without shrinking, and felt as little fear for the safety of his neck, on account of Gervase’s prophetic warning, as if he had never uttered it; and his silence

lence was merely occasioned by his curiosity to read the emotions visible in every line of his comrade's physiognomy, the moment the ominous couplet had been uttered by the Black Boy.

"By St. Mary! I don't like that Gervase," said Colbrande; "he hath a—a—something so unhuman about his eyes. I would thou had'st not plagued him, he's the devil——"

"And thou would'st hold a candle to him!" said Raynard; "thou'rt a fool, Colbrande. Nay, an he be the devil, like a good Catholic, I've only mocked and tormented him—that's no sin, is it?"

"Nay—nay—I do not fear him—exactly," said Colbrande, shrinking from the other's bantering; "but there's no good comes from jesting with, and vexing these mortals; I would fain have nought to do with them, and that's the truth on't."

"For my part, I fear no mischief from his mad prating, not I!" said Raynard, "and think my neck as secure now as ever

ever it was. Let children and old wives tremble at his say, I care not a fig for his mowing and devilry!"

Colbrande was silent, but not convinced; he had heard strange tales related of the pranks of the Black Boy, exaggerated no doubt by the narrators, but nevertheless they had made a deeper impression on his mind than even he himself was aware of.

Gervase, the Black Boy, was harmless and inoffensive when unmolested; and those who were in the constant habit of seeing him appear among them, either from motives of fear or pity, never offered offence to the poor half-witted creature. He was extremely taciturn, and would sit by himself for hours together, with his hands upon his knees, completely abstracted, as if gazing upon something passing before him, visible alone to his eyes, and from time to time muttering some unintelligible sounds. When he spoke, his words were uttered with such wildness and incoherency, that his speech seemed

seemed more like the effect of superhuman inspiration, than the language of the heart, or the expression of his own proper feelings; and all he said was listened to with rapt attention, and his inexplicable sayings were treasured up in the memories of his superstitious auditors, more valued on account of the obscurity of their meaning, than for any definable beauty or intelligence in his unconnected sentences.

There were many reports current of his vindictive disposition, but these spread abroad rather to his benefit than otherwise, for none ever ventured to prove their validity by exciting his resentment.

Raynard and Colbrande having hauled in their net, and selected the finest fish, now made for the shore, and safely mooring their boat in a small creek, Colbrande took the basket containing the fish upon his shoulders, and followed his comrade—his head full of the adventures of the morning, and boding no goodly conse-

quences to Raynard for his freak ; when on coming to a turning in their route, which turned round the base of a hill, he observed the Black Boy seated near the summit, trimming a large hazel stick, which he had cut from the thicket. Uttering an exclamation on so unexpectedly beholding the being, whose peculiar form was at that moment so busily occupied in raising the most absurd and improbable images in his mind, Colbrande started back, almost involuntarily letting fall the basket, the contents of which were quickly strewed upon the ground.

“ What maggot bites now ?” demanded Raynard, turning round upon his comrade without observing Gervase—“ Why, what ails thee ?”

“ Look—look there !” said Colbrande, pointing towards the Black Boy, who began clapping his hands and shouting.

“ Hath that wizard bewitched thee ?” said Raynard, shaking his staff at Gervase. “ Hear how the devil’s bird crows.

By

By St. George!" added he, assisting Colbrande to collect the scattered fish; "an he comes across me, I'll try my quarter-staff athwart his shoulders."

A slight tittering made them desist from their tedious occupation, and looking around, they perceived that the Black Boy had descended the hill, and was standing just beside them, resting leisurely, not to say gracefully, on the stick or club he had been trimming, and demonstrating the pleasure this accident gave him, by grinning most ironically; in their present humour this exultation was very galling, and irritated them exceedingly.—"Out on thee!" cried Raynard, his choler rising as he remarked how little his frowns or his threats moved the curious being he addressed—"Out on thee, brainless varlet!—sort thee with bats and owls, and come not mocking us with thy grimaces. Go to our grannams, and whisper and mumble thy ominous catches—we care not, neither fearing thee nor thy deeds—So

hie thee hence quickly, while thy legs can bear thee, or by St. Anthony ! my staff shall teach thee better manners."

Gervase drew himself up to his extremest height, and advancing at one long stride to the side of Colbrande, he fixed one hand firmly upon his shoulder, a familiarity by no means agreeable to the vassal, and pointing towards Raynard with his cudgel—"Yon's a mirky cloud!" exclaimed he—"the storm's rising, but the blast shall not break or bend the oak—it's firm!—firm!—firm!" shaking Colbrande rudely, and thrusting him from him—"firm—firm as a rock!"

"Art mad?" exclaimed Raynard, grasping his staff, and advancing towards Gervase in a threatening posture.

"Off!—off!" cried the Black Boy, standing on the defensive. "The red spot's on thy cheek, and the spark's in thine eye—but

"Heed thee, carl, nor in thine ire,  
Grapple with a thorny briar!"

"Curse

"Curse thy gibberish!" said Raynard, falling upon him. "Dost think to fright us with thy croaking?"

But he soon found it more expedient to use his staff than his tongue, for Gervase proved more than a match for him; and Colbrande, who had been thrown sprawling among the fish, (the greater part of which still remained scattered upon the ground,) by the might of the Black Boy, perceiving the fruitless efforts of his comrade's hardiness, and his fast-failing strength, ran quickly to his aid, and this able auxiliary soon checked the rapid and victorious progress of the furious Gervase, whose prowess dealt such mighty blows upon the heads and shoulders of his two adversaries, as made them quake again.

Notwithstanding the dexterity however with which he kept them at bay for many minutes, and the bravery with which he defended himself from their unequal assault, he was suddenly thrown into a dangerous predicament by the breaking of

his treacherous cudgel ; but he scorned to fly, although suffering under this additional disadvantage, and having little hopes of being able to escape the fury of the enraged vassals.

As they pressed step by step upon him, their left hands clutched the short knives they bore in their girdles, ready to dispatch him. For in those barbarous times, the murder of a much greater man than the poor half-witted Gervase would have called for but little inquiry or punishment ; unless indeed he chanced to be the thrall or vassal of some powerful noble, and even in that case the affair could be easily compromised for a sum of money, and be considered a sufficient compensation too. Barons, bishops, clergy, laity, nay, even the sacred person of the king, were all valued at a certain price.

Gervase saw the inevitable blow that threatened to fall upon his devoted head, and crush him ; but panting and foaming with rage at the cowardice of his assailants,

ants, he was resolved to struggle till the last gasp; though at every blow he warded from his body, the remnant of his cudgel became more and more useless.

In this desperate situation, when all hope had fled, a youth, attracted by the noise of their conflict, suddenly made his appearance from behind the hill, and perceiving it was not, as he had suspected, only in sport, was immediately prompted to join the weaker party; and flourishing his staff, he placed himself, to the great surprise of Colbrande and Raynard, beside the Black Boy; and there was a momentary cessation of hostility at his unexpected appearance and interposition—“By my soul,” cried the youth, with a most commanding look, “ye must and shall desist!”

“What, thou knave!” exclaimed Raynard, fiercely. “Who taught thee to crow so valiantly? stand back, or by St. Anthony——”

“I’ll crack thy costard!” interrupted

the youth, shaking his staff at him, not the least intimidated by his threats. “ A pretty couple of hardy varlets truly, to fall upon a single-handed man! but a truce to parleying, for, by my life, my staff longs to be better acquainted with thy ribs.”

“ I’ll speedily shame thy vaunting !” cried Raynard, brandishing his staff, and attacking him.

“ In truth, thou hast excelled me in that already,” replied the youth; “ but I’ll have my revenge, by shaming thy false fighting.” And returning the blows of Raynard in good earnest, he acquitted himself so well, that the vassal soon lay sprawling and senseless on the greensward; and Colbrande, who possessed more policy than courage, immediately he saw his comrade fall, was fain to seek for safety in retreat, and scoured over the ground with the fleetness of a greyhound, leaving Raynard to the mercy of the vanquisher.

“ Hah ! hah !” exclaimed Gervase, exultingly,

ingly, while the scintillations of his dark eyes expressed the pleasure he experienced at the flight of his enemy, “ when the falcon swoops, the sparrows flee. Hillio! hillio! one bird has fallen though,” added he, turning towards the body of Raynard, and fixing his eyes upon it, he fell into a musing and reverie, ever and anon giving utterance to his inward thoughts in low murmurings; while the gallant youth who had rescued him from the merciless hands of the vassals, remained unnoticed and unthanked; he appeared to have forgotten his presence, and the great cause he had to acknowledge his generous and disinterested conduct; while the youth, on his part, was as silently and intently observing the mysterious behaviour of the Black Boy, rather marvelling at his absence of mind, than offended at his apparent lack of gratitude. He was a handsome strippling, of not more than seventeen or eighteen years; but his actions and speech were those of maturer age; his mien was

noble, and in his bright blue eye there was more persuasiveness than austerity, though the peremptory tone of his voice commanded attention and obedience: his brown hair curled naturally from beneath his small round cap or bonnet, which was fantastically adorned with a single feather plucked from a raven's wing, and made of the same coarse material as his grey frock or gaberdine, which was buckled tight round his waist by a leathern girdle, exhibiting his finely-formed figure to the greatest advantage, even in this simple and humble garb; his nether garments were of the same stuff and complexion; and although his well-turned legs were hoseless, he wore a pair of huseans, or loose half boots of dressed leather, with wooden soles, upon his feet. In the most easy and graceful attitude, he stood observing the actions of Gervase; the utmost benevolence, mingled with compassion, beaming in his expressive countenance, rendering him

him altogether a most elegant and interesting youth.

After regarding the body of Raynard some time, absorbed in the profoundest thought, Gervase kneeled down beside him, and thrusting his hand in the other's breast, he found his heart still pulsated, and he exclaimed—

“ The heart beats, and the brach will live ;  
But the scoffer, I wot, shall never thrive.  
The bough shall bend—the bough shall bend,  
And thou shalt hang !”

Saying this, he rose ; and turning towards his deliverer, a momentary flash of recollection seemed to dart across his bewildered mind, and running eagerly towards him, he cried out—“ Fly ! fly ! yon scampering hound will yelp and cry, and (let him lick his wounds) bring the pack upon thee presently—fly !” repeated he, earnestly, almost beseechingly.

“ Beshrew my heart, good Gervase,” replied the youth, “ but it grieves me sore to shrink like a thievish fox from

such a foe; let them come singly on, and give me fair play, the which, by the mass, they neither know nor practise, and I will do my best effort to beat them back again. Think not, Gervase," continued he, while the colour mounted in his cheek at the bare idea of causing such suspicion, " that I repent me of taking part with thee in this broil; nay, whatever come of it, I will rejoice that my hand hath chastised yon prostrate dastard!"

The winding of a horn at some distance now sounded through hill and dale, and was presently answered in two or three different directions, and startled Gervase, who, looking wildly upon his deliverer, and grinding his teeth, seemed agitated by the mingled passions of fear and rage.— "Rest thee, rest thee here, firm!" cried he, speaking rapidly, "they're out—stir not, or thou'l rush into their merciless jaws!" and instantly running towards a tall tree, he began to mount it, climbing and clinging with his arms and legs with the agility

lity of a squirrel ; and in a most incredible short space of time, reached the top ; and taking firm hold of the tree with his legs and one hand, he held up the other to his forehead, apparently to keep the light from his eyes, and assist his vision in discovering the motions, number, and route of the vassals.

## CHAPTER VI.

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WHILST Gervase, the Black Boy, was busily reconnoitering the enemy, who were collecting from all quarters, and flying towards the spot where the signal-horn was sounded, and where Colbrande, with woe-  
ful face and wounds, and piteous tale of  
the desperate encounter they had had  
with Gervase and the youth, excited their  
anger, and inspired them with the ardent  
desire of avenging their fallen comrade,  
for

for Colbrande's friendly fears had reported him dead, Roland (the name of the gallant youth) remained below, observing his manœuvres.

Gervase having looked all around him, descended again with even much greater celerity than he had climbed the tree; and running towards Roland—“Follow!” cried he, “or we are trapped! they're out!” and, running round the base of the hill, Roland, without uttering a word, followed close at his heels.

But they had not advanced far in their route, when the quick and vigilant eye of Gervase discerned two or three vassals at some distance, running towards the place through which he was guiding Roland; and instantly putting his finger on his companion's lips to warn him to remain silent, he made him stretch himself at full length behind a hillock; and then running forward, he met the vassals, and accosting them, pointed in the opposite direction to where Roland lay.

“Seize

"Seize him!" cried all of them in one breath, the moment they beheld him; but they all seemed more willing to command than execute, each leaving the honour of capturing him to his fellows, and they all remained irresolute how to act. It was certainly their duty to hold him a prisoner, as well as all they should meet in their way, as the signals of their comrades had given them notice that there was mischief abroad; but the fearlessness with which Gervase regarded them, and his tall, muscular, and formidable figure, made them dread his resistance to such arbitrary measures.

"Whither art thou going?" demanded one of them.

"To chase the frogs in the meadows, and seek cuckoos' eggs," replied Gervase.

"Know'st thou the cause of this bruit?" said another.

"They've smote a carrion-crow, and the horns call to the feasting!" replied he — "there

—“there—there!” pointing the way he wished them to go—“there it lies, thro’ yon brake—run fleetly, or ye’ll have not a feather.”

The horns sounded again.

“Hah!” cried the vassal, who appeared to possess the most intelligence of the three, “they sound again; fly onwards, and I’ll remain and take charge of the boat yonder, to prevent the escape of any one that way,” looking significantly at Gervase; “’tis probable they may make for that, and peradventure elude our comrades in case of pursuit—ye’ll know where to find me.”

His companions nodded, and fortunately struck into the road Gervase had pointed out; and the vassal thinking it advisable perhaps to take no farther notice of him, walked immediately towards the boat. However, the moment his back was turned, and Gervase imagined the other vassals were beyond the reach of his voice, he beckoned Roland, who was upon the watch,  
to

to come forth. They then followed the vassal as quickly and quietly as possible; for, as the man suspected, it was really the intention of Gervase to make use of the boat to facilitate the escape of himself and Roland from the fury of Colbrande and the whole troop of vassals, who, in a combined body, would, he was aware, instantly assemble, and fly with alacrity to avenge an injury done to one of their clan.

The vassal however hearing their approach, turned round, and the moment he beheld Roland in company with the Black Boy, he suspected treachery—the truth flashed across his mind; and taking to his heels, he endeavoured to reach the boat for safety; but his swiftness availed him nothing, for Gervase no sooner saw they were observed, than he bounded forward like a hart before the hounds, and overtook him just as he reached the margin of the river; when, finding it was impossible to unmoor the boat in time, the vassal bravely turned upon his pursuers, and,  
with

with his knife in his left hand, and brandishing his staff, he stood prepared to defend himself, and resist any attempt to gain the boat. But with the quickness of lightning, Gervase, unarmed as he was, darted upon him, and grasping him by the throat, deprived him both of breath and ability to act, and thrust him backwards into the stream. Meanwhile Roland untied the rope which fastened the boat, and both jumping in, pulled lustily for the opposite bank, leaving the vassal to shift for himself as well as he was able. Fortunately for him however he could swim, and therefore scrambled out again with little difficulty.

A few minutes afterwards he was surrounded by at least a score of vassals, led on by Colbrande, and the two who had just before quitted him, eagerly inquiring for Gervase and Roland, and they learned their escape with the bitterest demonstrations of rage; and moreover had the mortification

tification of seeing them safely land on the opposite bank.

“ By St. Anthony !” said Colbrande, “ they have escaped us !—Why—why did ye let that madman, that mooncalf and planner of mischiefs, slip so foolishly through your fingers ?” addressing the vassals, who had previously informed him of their meeting with Gervase.

“ Truly, because we did not suspect him,” replied one of them.

“ Thou had’st no right to judge,” said Colbrande, angrily, “ and should’st have seized him. Curse on thy folly and faint-heartedness !”

“ Wheugh !” cried the man, who had been cast into the water in the execution of his duty, and was still dripping. “ In verity, Colbrande, thou speak’st mighty big words; but I pray thee, who wilt thou find to catch that imp of darkness ? for what man ever grappled with him, or crossed him, but hath sorely suffered for his fool-hardiness ?”

“ What ?

"What? did I not struggle with him?" said Colbrande, in a tone of defiance.

"Doubtless; but after all thou wast fain to take to thy heels for safety," replied the other.

"'Sdeath! what mean'st thou?" said Colbrande, drawing his knife; "I fought till that fellow, his abettor, came and struck down Raynard."

"Come, come, let's have no brawling 'mong friends, a' God's name!" said one of the party, interfering; "put up thine *anlace*, Colbrande, and let's seek our comrade's body. The truth is, the foul fiend hath fallen upon ye both, and buffeted you, and ye doubtless fought like true men; and what could mortals do more? So come, Colbrande, lead us to the spot where ye encountered these lawless knaves, and let's see whether that strippling's staff hath dealt a death's blow to Raynard or not."

Colbrande was pacified; and bitterly disappointed at the failure of the vengeance

ance he had meditated on Roland and Gervase, he led his comrades to the spot where Raynard had fallen.

The first object that struck them on winding round the hill, was Raynard himself, not lying as Colbrande had left him, stretched like a corse on the greensward, but sitting upright, with his hand to his head ; alive and breathing, though pallid, and apparently ill at ease from the effects of the blow he had received, and which had for a time deprived him of sense and motion. The vassals welcomed this unexpected sight with a loud huzza, and rushed towards him with every expression of delight.

“ Holy Virgin be praised !” cried Raynard, though rather faintly—“ the thickness of my nonce hath saved my life ! But how camest thou off so cleverly, Colbrande ?”

“ I was overmatched,” replied Colbrande, reluctantly, “ and fled.”

“ Thy light heels then served thee better

ter than my thick head, by the mass!" said Raynard; "for, without jesting, that varlet's staff hath shaken all my bones.—Comrades, lend me a hand."

They raised him gently up, and supported him.—"That knave was too quick for me—a dog!—I must seek father Francis, for truly I wot 'twill need his leech-craft to set me to rights again.—Confound that varlet!—Lead me to the monastery, I pray ye—my head whirls, and swims, and rolls about in an odd manner.—Curse the staff—I'll pay him, and kindly too, an' I catch him, trust me.—Gently—gently—an' ye let me slip, I shall break to pieces."

Conversing in this strain, and interlarding his speech with invectives against his enemies, they led him to the monastery, according to his request, to receive the benefit of father Francis's chirurgical skill, or leech-craft, as he termed it; by the way his comrades informed him, in answer to his inquiries, of every circumstance

stance concerning the escape of Roland and the Black Boy.

Meanwhile Gervase, upon gaining the opposite bank, threw the paddles into the boat, and left it to chance, and the force of the wind or tide to direct its course wherever they might.

"There's no nest in the lands of De Redvers for thee or me!" said the black boy.

"And whither wilt thou bend thy steps?" asked Roland.

"Where the fox kennels, or the bat builds, I can dwell," replied Gervase, pondering; then presently looking in Roland's face, while his own appeared momentarily illumined by a ray of returning reason and intelligence—"Good den—good den," said he, shaking Roland's hand—"guard thee cunningly from yon earls—they feel not here," pointing to his heart, "what I feel!" and the moisture which dimmed the brightness of his dark and piercing eyes, evinced the tenderness of its

its feeling towards the youth; “the fire glows when the warm blood flows! but go—go—my head whirrs and wanders, and my tongue grows thick: when the tempest roars, and the pelting rains fall, I’ll bring a forest bough to shield thee!”

And waving his hand, before Roland could reply, he bounded lightly over an adjoining hedge, and vanished in a moment.

“Poor fellow!” exclaimed Roland, moved at the expression of his gratitude; “’tis pity thy head should wander so, when thy heart is so sensible and so full of grateful feeling! He must be a brute (a giant too in strength) who would harm thee; and he no true man, who would tamely stand by and see thee injured and oppressed.”

His own peculiar situation however demanded immediate consideration, for the vassals of De Redvers having marked the spot of his landing, would doubtless pursue him as soon as they could procure another

other boat. To return to his own cot was impossible, for it was unfortunately situate just on the borders of the earle of Oxford's demesnes, and although not appertaining to that noble, was very likely to be visited by his vassals, who, under shelter of their great and arbitrary lord, committed numerous depredations with impunity on those, who were unfortunate enough to be so contiguous as to tempt them : and in this instance, where they really had some shadow of an excuse, though an unjust one, they would not hesitate to avail themselves of it; for it was more than probable that many of the vassals would recognise him from Colbrande's description, and seek him in his humble dwelling.

Tormented with the thought that his aged father, the only relative he had in the world, should suffer any insult from the unfeeling brutality of the vassals for his offence, he cast himself in despair upon the earth—"Alas!" cried he, "how

irretrievably unhappy have I rendered myself, by exerting my arm in a just cause, to which every feeling of humanity prompted me! Oh, my kind and revered father! what bitter pangs will thine affectionate heart suffer, when the shades of evening obscure the light, and the returning night brings not thy Roland with it! What anxious fears and evil forebodings wilt thou endure for thy truant son! Would that I could behold thee, but one short moment, to unfold to thee the cause of my flying so suddenly from the peaceful home, where all the joys of infancy and youth have burst upon me, pleasant and smiling as a summer's morn! Oh, what an eve is this to such a day! and I am assured thou would'st not blame (too well I know thy goodness) but laud me for the deed I've done, though thine eyes wept, while thy tongue should praise me. But no—thou shalt not feel the lingering pain of expectation, never to be satisfied—kind Heaven will guide my erring

erring steps, and I will hazard all—my life—to bid thee but farewell."

Having thus given vent to his filial sentiments, and his final resolution, he became calm again, and rising from the earth where he had prostrated himself, he sought some more sequestered spot, where he might remain concealed till the approach of night, at which season he determined to fulfil his intentions of once more revisiting his father, trusting the darkness and the lateness of the hour would effectually preclude any detection from his enemies.

## CHAPTER VII.

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THE loneliness and uninterrupted silence of the spot he had chosen, and the exertion he had undergone, disposed Roland to repose; and reflecting on his mishap, and the dangerous enterprize he had resolved to undertake on the coming night, he gradually sunk into a sound sleep, which happy forgetfulness endured for several hours; and when he awoke, he was surprised at the utter darkness that surrounded him. Fearful of having slept too long, he aroused himself, and grasping his trusty staff, began hastily to retrace his way to the banks of the river—a task which the darkness rendered extremely difficult to accomplish. At last however he had the happiness of hearing the gentle rippling and splashing of the waters, occasioned

occasioned by the evening breeze ; and he hailed the welcome sounds with rapture.

Quickly stripping himself, he bound up his garments with his girdle, and, fastening them to his head, plunged boldly into the river ; dashing aside the waters with his vigorous arm, and fearlessly setting every danger at defiance, he thought only of his parent, and this thought inspired him with more than ordinary strength to perform his arduous task, and in a short time he reached the opposite bank in safety. Donning his habiliments, without a moment's delay, he proceeded through many a well-known field and meadow, and many a tangled brake, towards his father's cot ; but never before had the way appeared so long and tedious as in his present eagerness he deemed it.

In half-an-hour he had advanced so far on his journey, that he was within a short distance of the pleasant valley, in which stood the humble dwelling of his father, surrounded, at irregular distances, by

about a dozen others, built much after the same model, and with the same materials, consisting chiefly of turf and wood, sheltered by a thick strong thatch of straw; the whole forming a small village, most romantically situated; for the surrounding hills, covered with the knotted oak, the dark green elm, and broad-leaved chestnut, with many shrubs of meaner growth, and blooming heath, and harebells, and a thousand wild and beautiful, though scentless flowers, formed a natural wall around their lowly habitations, and equally secured them from the severer blasts of winter, and the sultry heat of the summer sun.

In the midst of this delightful retreat, there was an extensive green, where, after the labours of the day, the villagers were wont to assemble, and recreate themselves in various games and pastimes—wrestling, jumping, running, pitching the bar, or shooting their arrows at a butt, or mark, fastened to the trunk of a decayed oak, at the extreme end of their rural lawn: and then

then the maidens, blooming, fresh, and wild, as the flowers adorning their native valley, would come tripping forth, arrayed in dimpled smiles, while the echoes repeated their merry laugh, and in an instant the rustic swains would lay aside their warlike weapons, and quit their ruder games, to join in the fantastic and inspiring dance.

As Roland trudged on, a thousand fond recollections of the happy and peaceful days he had passed in that valley (which he was about to quit for his own safety, and the tranquillity of the inhabitants whom he loved) recurred to his mind, and he was sad, for he loved his father most affectionately. Roland too was the pride of the old man's heart; he had trained him up to arms from his infancy, and had the gratification of seeing him excel all his youthful companions in every warlike game and exercise; and eagerly he looked forward to the time, when, at a maturer age, the youth would be enabled to follow

the noble whose vassal he was, and signalize himself in the field; well convinced, that his courage and his skill would insure him brilliant success, and soon gain him that approbation and distinction he merited.

Roland was fired with the same ambition, and ardently wished for an opportunity to display his valour and attainments, for of late, though he scarcely dared confess this to himself, he had experienced an irksomeness, and a distaste for the company and pastimes of the peasantry, among whom he had already attained such a superiority, that he longed for a wider field for the exercise of his prowess.

The youth had now but one hill to surmount, and his heart leaped with joy as he entered the narrow pass, that would presently lead him to his home, and his affectionate father's arms; he pressed forward with renewed ardour, and threaded the winding way with lusty strides, when he was startled by a sudden illumination of the surrounding obscurity, and looking upward,

upward, with beating heart he beheld the red glare reflected in the dark heavens above; he dared hardly suspect the meaning of this sudden burst of light—his heart sunk within him, and rushing wildly forward, his trembling steps bore him towards the valley.

As he approached nearer and nearer to the village, the light rapidly increased; and now the mingled sounds of the peasants' horns, and a confusion of voices, struck terror into his soul; and when the valley opened upon his distracted view, he beheld the peasants assembled round his father's cot, from which the fierce red flames issued in all the horrors of conflagration; their pale, fear-stricken features visible in the appalling light, and their long dark shadows spreading o'er the ground. In an instant he rushed breathless among the astonished crowd, and—“My father! my father!” was all he could utter.

Twenty shrieking voices informed him

the old man was still in the burning dwelling, and they called loudly, but in vain, upon the despairing youth to stay. Roland heard not their intreaties, but precipitated himself into the burning pile, amid loud exclamations of terror and astonishment from the peasantry.

“ He is lost ! the brave Roland is lost ! ” cried every foreboding voice, and every honest heart instantly poured forth a silent prayer, for the repose of the souls of the good old father and his valiant son. Scarcely, however, were their prayers uttered, when the figure of Roland again appeared, emerging from amidst the flames, bearing the body of his aged sire in his arms.

Loud acclamations rent the air at this affecting sight, and many an eye was dimmed by a starting tear, a precious tribute to the heroism of the gallant Roland ; and in one body they rushed forward, and relieved him of his precious burthen.

The fire had most miraculously raged  
in

in a different direction to where the old man slept, and though the thick smoke and heat had almost suffocated him, as he lay sleeping and unconscious of danger upon his lowly pallet, the refreshing action of the cool atmosphere soon restored him to life and recollection : and when he beheld his dear Roland, whose unusually protracted absence had alarmed him, kneeling beside him, and learned that he had providentially arrived in time to rescue him from a dreadful death, he pressed him to his heart, and called down the blessing of Heaven upon his head, while the tears slowly trickled down his furrowed cheeks.

All attempts to rescue the cot from destruction would have been fruitless, for the light combustible materials of which it was composed, when once thoroughly ignited, were not to be extinguished ; the fierce element besides consumed the fabric too rapidly for any human aid or art to arrest its progress with any hope of ulti-

mate success ; and therefore abandoning it to its fate, the peasantry turned their whole attention towards the comfort of old Geoffrey, whom they so much esteemed, both for his own sake, and that of his valiant son. And the only difficulty which arose among these honest, unsophisticated peasants, was, who should have the honour of entertaining their houseless neighbour—a most amiable contention, which was at last decided in favour of the eldest inhabitant of the village, a man but a few years younger than old Geoffrey, and his chief gossip. This matter being satisfactorily arranged, Roland led the old man to the place of his destination, where he recounted to him the unfortunate broil in which he had been so suddenly and unexpectedly engaged, and concluded by asking his advice in what manner he should conduct himself—whether to remain, and endeavour to justify himself by an appeal to the noble earle of Oxford, in case of any attempt on the part of the vas-  
sals

sals to avenge the fall of their comrade, or to depart, and enlist himself under the banner of some chief, who was about to wage war at home or abroad. And in asking him to decide upon these queries, he put the last alternative in such strong terms, that it was evident to Geoffrey that he was prejudiced in favour of its superiority ; and wishing not to thwart the natural bent of his inclination, or damp the glowing ardour of his youthful spirit, the old man reluctantly consented to his departure.

There were other cogent reasons too, which urged him to this decision ; he feared not only that Roland's life would be in jeopardy, but that the tranquillity of the whole village would be disturbed, by a feud with the minions of such a powerful baron as Baldwyn de Redvers ; nor would the vavasour, or petty baron, under whose protection they all lived, deem so trivial an affair worthy his reprobation, or his avenging, even if there were

were the least shadow of a possibility, that his threats or his forces possessed sufficient power or influence to demand restitution from the earle. He explained these apprehensions to Roland, who gladly coincided with him in every thing tending to promote his own wishes. But when Geoffrey informed him of the cause which gave rise to these reflections, the youth was struck dumb with astonishment, and was now convinced that his own fears were well founded.

It appeared, that just before set of sun, Colbrande, accompanied by a few of his comrades, had entered the village, and instantly proceeded to the cot of Geoffrey, hoping perchance to entrap the youth by coming thus unawares upon him; but they discovered Geoffrey sitting alone, and wondering at the stay of Roland. He arose on their entrance and demanded their will; though their numbers and appearance rather excited suspicion of the goodness of their errand.

“ Thou

"Thou hast a son?" said Colbrande, inquiringly.

"I have, thank Heaven!" replied the old man; "and one whom I am proud to call by that name. Dost thou know aught of him?"

"More than we wish," answered Colbrande.

"Then, by St. Mary!" said the old man, "thou know'st but little of him, an thou yearn'st not for better knowledge; for those who know him, love him, and still desire to know him better—and none but his enemies, the which I trust ye are not, think a little of him, far too much!"

"Dotard!" cried Colbrande, frowning, for he felt the truth of this assertion, "we came not hither to list to thy lauding, but to seek the reckless ronyon whom thou call'st thy son—to teach him better manners, a cub!"

"Would he were here, to teach thee better!" said Geoffrey.

"Peace!" cried Colbrande, drawing his sword,

sword, “ or, by the holy rood, I’ll make a scabbard of thy wrinkled carcase !”

Unmoved at this threat of the blustering Colbrande, the old veteran drew himself up with all the dignified pride of a true soldier ; and regarding him with the utmost coolness and indifference, he pointed to his polished arms, which hung suspended on the walls of his cot.—“ I have borne these arms,” said he, “ and though the hand of time hath somewhat bowed me down, and blanched my locks, I still can wield them, when just occasion calls me to the field ; nor am I to be frightened by the brawling of a boy. Nay, sheathe thy glaive, there is no shame in’t ; ’tis a greater far to grasp it naked.”

Colbrande rebuked, and yet ashamed to show it by any outward sign, struggled hard to conceal his real feelings ; while he returned his glittering blade to its scabbard.—“ Old man,” said he, “ we wish not to offend thee ; we come to seek thy son, who hath offended us, and we do believe thou

thou hold'st him here in close concealment,  
whate'er thou sayest."

"Indeed!" said Geoffrey.

"By the mass, we do!" cried Colbrande.

"And may I ask his crime?" said Geoffrey. "What outrage hath he committed, that ye come in such a formidable body to arrest him? say, tell me, what hath Roland done?"

"This seeming ignorance doth become thee well, by my troth," said Colbrande, sneeringly; "but 'twill not do. We must and will beat the bushes for the fox; so, by thy leave——"

"An it be so, and only by my leave," replied Geoffrey, "thou hast it not, I do assure thee. Were he here, I would not let thee harm him without cause; but wherefore dost thou seek him with so much earnestness? is his guilt so heinous that it doth offend thy tongue to name it, or else so slight thou art ashamed to speak it?"

"He

"He hath stricken one of our comrades sorely, and peradventure mortally," said one of the vassals.

"What provocation?—Roland never strikes without a cause," said Geoffrey.

"He had none!" said Colbrande, impetuously—"an he had, what then? he shall not strike De Redvers' men without return: but I'll hold no longer parley with thee.—Comrades——"

Colbrande was here interrupted by the opening of the cottage-door, and the entrance of the villagers, who foreboding no good from the hostile appearance of De Redvers' vassals, had buckled on their swords, and flown in a body to the assistance of their old neighbour, determined to protect him from any insult which they might be inclined to offer. Their number and appearance had the good effect of checking the audacity of Colbrande and his fellows, and at the same time it encouraged Geoffrey to resist them.

"What

"What make these men of war here?" inquired one of the villagers.

"They seek Roland," replied the old man.

"Roland—Roland!" repeated a dozen voices in a breath—"What hath Roland done, that they should seek him in such unfriendly shape?"

"Some deed," replied Geoffrey, "that hath given umbrage; a deed, I vow, that will not blur his name, so well I know him; but a deed no less, than calls these men all hither in hottest haste, eager for revenge; and yet a nameless deed!"

"Goodman!" said Colbrande, "thou say'st thy son is not here?"

"I do repeat it; Roland is not here, nor have I seen him since the morn," said Geoffrey.

"Enough!" said Colbrande, "I'm satisfied. Comrades, away; we'll take a fitter opportunity to face him:" and followed by his companions, he abruptly quitted the cottage, fearful that should they

they irritate the peasants, whose numbers were so far superior, they might suffer a defeat, where they came with full intent to conquer and chastise; and the greater part of those who had accompanied the politic, but far from brave, Colbrande, much resembled him in temperament and disposition, being never inclined to draw, but where there existed an indisputable advantage on their side.

After they had withdrawn themselves, Geoffrey imparted to his kind friends all that had transpired; and though the shades of night were fast coming on, many of them volunteered their services, and sought for some distance round the valley for the absent Roland; suspecting, that having seen the vassals approaching, he had been deterred from coming home, and wisely concealed himself among the hills or forests. But after an hour's fruitless search, they returned to the anxious Geoffrey, who sighing, thanked them heartily for their kindness; and all had long

long retired to their homes, when they were alarmed by the sudden blaze of Geoffrey's cot.

Thus much the old man was in possession of—the cause of the fire could not be accounted for, although it was generally suspected among the villagers, that Colbrande and his party were principally concerned in it. Perchance believing, notwithstanding the earnest asseverations of Geoffrey, that Roland was still concealed within the dwelling, they had secretly and maliciously set it in flames, hoping the inhabitants, whose senses would be lulled in overpowering sleep, might inevitably perish in the sudden conflagration.

CHAPTER VIII.  
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MATILDA, the young and beautiful consort of king Stephen, in all the joyfulness and mirth of an innocent heart, was wiling away her happy hours in sweet discourse with her fair companion and confidante, the enchanting Avis Delavigne, the eldest daughter of a distinguished noble of Boulogne, whose *naïveté* and fascinating manners attracted the notice, and ultimately gained her the confidence and affection of the queen. The figure of Avis, although rather below the middling stature, was incomparably well formed, exhibiting such fine and exquisite proportion, as feasted the eyes and ravished the hearts of all the gallants, and noble and valiant knights of king Stephen's court. Her beautiful countenance was continually illumined by the

the cheerful glow of smiling good nature; and while her mellifluous voice ran gaily on, her dark eyes sent forth such bright scintillations, as won the love and admiration of her hearers; but what rendered her more charming, was the natural and unaffected grace which accompanied all her words and actions, drawing forth admiration, without the desire to be pre-eminent in aught but what was good and virtuous. Coquetry and envy were alike strangers to her innocent bosom; the one she needed not for conquest, and nature had precluded her from experiencing the bitter torment of the other, by lavishly bestowing upon her such transcendant beauty, as rendered her superior to the influence of its envenomed sting.

Both Matilda and her confidante were employed in embroidering various tinted stuffs with gold and silver thread, in fair devices of floresc and figure, either for their own diversion or use. Indeed, in those days, when learning and books were

were so rare, this elegant employment formed the chief amusement of the ladies, on whose hands time would have otherwise hung heavily, being immured within the walls of their lords' castles, more stately and magnificent than convenient or agreeable, and they were seldom or ever permitted to participate in, or witness the pleasures of the rude and boisterous revels in the hall—a prohibition which was extended even to the queen herself, except on particular occasions of great state and ceremony, a custom (however singular it may appear to the ladies of the present polished and enlightened age, whose fascinating manners and conversation form the greatest charm of modern assemblies) dictated by the nicest sentiment of delicacy and propriety; for the unlicensed freedom of speech and manners in those assemblages was not at all fitted for female ears or eyes. On their part, the ladies felt no inclination to infringe upon this strict observance, but solaced themselves with their

their damsels and children, or in music and singing, which accomplishments were cultivated with great felicity, and sometimes with much proficiency ; and although they could not boast the improvements of later ages, their melodies were simple, sweet, and affecting, and were certainly calculated to touch the heart, to sooth the fiercer passions, and create the softest emotions of pleasure. Their ditties were simple, wild and uncultivated flowers ; while the ballads and madrigals of the common people were extravagantly long, sometimes consisting of twenty and thirty verses, and generally partaking too much of coarse ribaldry and obscenity to delight any but the vulgar herd of clowns and huscarls, although the chanting of these lewd rhimes by the unpolished lords themselves at their festive carousals and banquets, was a thing of no uncommon occurrence.

The apartment in which the queen and her maid of honour were seated, was ra-

ther capacious than commodious, bearing not the slightest resemblance to the elegant boudoir of a modern lady. The lofty ceiling was of oak, carved in various rude devices of fruit and flowers, and grotesque heads of satyrs or cherubims; the stone walls, hung with tapestry of Norman fabrication, representing subjects from mythologic store, either amatory or heroic; the floor strewn with clean rushes (a luxury only to be found in the castles of the great); and at the extreme end of the chamber was a toilette, or dressing-table, the slab whereof was of polished chesnut, and the legs carved and gilt, whereon stood a mirror, set in a silver-gilt frame, and an ivory casket, containing various gawds and trinkets; and opposite to it stood one of a similar description, bearing a handsome lute, and two painted flower vases, of Flemish manufacture, filled with bouquets, prettily trimmed and arranged by the fair and delicate hands of Avis, who was herself seated beside her royal mistress

mistress on a couch, covered with fine stuff of a deep rose colour, richly embroidered and laced, and there were footstools of the same.

Their conversation was mostly carried on in French, their native tongue, flowing in more expressive strain, and describing their thoughts and sentiments with more facility than their knowledge of the English would have enabled them to have done, although they were perfectly conversant in that language.

"By our lady, sweet Avis!" said the queen, with all the characteristic vivacity of her nation, "England is a fairer place than report doth speak it; 'tis true, I have seen but little yet, but what I have, doth make me desire to see much more on't. What think'st thou?"

"Truly, thus," replied Avis; "the place is of as good seeming in riches, power, and strength, as any potentate would wish to govern; so doubtless doth

his good highness think, I wot; and so your grace, but——”

“ But what?” interrupted the queen, eagerly. “ Hast thou then found some blur or blemish to rail at? Come, prithee let’s hear thy nice exceptions.”

“ Your grace hath ta’en offence?” said Avis.

“ Nay, none, sweet Avis, by our lady of Roche! none,” said the queen. “ Speak fairly out, I will not impeach thee of treason.”

“ England is fair, I do allow,” said Avis.

“ A fair allowance,” cried the queen, smiling at Avis’s precision, “ which comes like a well-trimmed page to usher in a good apology.”

“ The nobles, knights, and vassals,” continued Avis, “ all fair too, of goodly carriage and demeanour; and yet withal there is a rudeness, a bluntness in their speech, which makes not such music on mine

mine ear as that of the courteous vassals of dear Boulogne."

"Ha, ha!" cried the queen, laughing; "in good sooth, an honest confession, of great credit to thy penetration too! And I vow to thee, Avis, an' I have power to polish the roughness of which thou makest so rueful a complaint, thou shalt be quickly rid of all impertinence which now thou takest so much to heart. I will proclaim it to all England, to all courtly suitors who would sue for the fair hand of Avis Delavigne, that they must first reform their manners and their speech, or else yield up the prize in hopelessness."

"Or I will teach them that truth myself," said Avis, gaily. "I'll play the coquette, and torment them; now raise their hopes with smiles, and then depress them with a killing frown. What, lead a bear in the rosy wreaths of love? *fi donc!* the thorns are good enough."

"There are a few among them that are better than the rest," said the queen.

“ They are not all alike; I trust there are surely some more gentle, gallant, and sooth than their fellows. Is’t not so, Avis?”

“ A—a few—a scanty few,” replied Avis; “ some flowers among the weeds, but rather damaged by their vicinage.”

“ And would flourish better, perchance, an’ they were transplanted beneath the influence of thy favouring smiles—ey, Avis?”

“ They must inevitably improve,” said Avis; “ but then the pains of culture? no—no, spare me that, kind Cupid! there’s not such lack of gallants that I must train one purposely to please me. In France I can pick a bouquet, where in England I can only find one solitary flower.”

“ Compare the bouquet to that single flower,” said the queen; “ one rose is worth fifty poppies!”

“ Why, ay, I think your grace hath reason there,” said Avis.

“ I love

"I love my country, and my countrymen," said the queen; "but truly I have ever thought, and happily have found, that France produces better gallants, England better husbands."

"I shall reflect——"

"Thou giddy girl!" interrupted the queen, smiling, "when did'st thou such a thing?—reflect!"

"Ay, your grace!" replied Avis, with pretended gravity; "a husband is a serious—very serious thing."

"And doth thine heart fail thee?"

"Nay," said Avis, "when that happens, 'twill be time to surrender it on the best terms."

A page in waiting announced sir William de Lacy.

"Give the knight entrance," said the queen, "and we will give him audience." Then, turning to Avis, observed—"A fair knight; and a handsome, Avis—what think'st thou, is he one of the few?"

"He is—courteous," replied Avis,

luctantly, while a slight tinge suffused her cheeks.

“ And handsome ?” said the queen.

“ Why—yes—tolerable.”

“ Brave ?” added the queen.

“ He is an English knight.”

“ Provoking !” said the queen. “ Verily, Avis, thou wilt not allow him any grace or favour but by halves. By our Lady, this is feigned !—he is——”

“ Here !” interrupted Avis, archly, as the young knight entered the apartment, and courteously saluted them.

He was tall, but peculiarly well made, and the graceful and easy manner in which he moved, shewed how used he was to all the forms and ceremonies of a court; and there was a modest confidence in his address, which at the same time it obtained him the attention, insured him the approbation of those whom he addressed; and he had too much discretion to take advantage of this favour when obtained, to run the chance of losing it by letting his

his vanity or conceit prompt him to over-step the bounds prescribed by the strictest decorum or etiquette ; nay, not even so far as he might have done with impunity. He had scarcely seen twenty summers, yet had already proved himself brave and hardy in the field, which gained him the esteem of the men, and being withal handsome and gallant, he easily won the favour of the fair. He could moreover sing, dance, and play on the lute ; and was in every respect an accomplished cavalier—a soldier in the field, but a gallant at court.

His long flaxen hair curled naturally, and hung gracefully down his shoulders ; his mustachios were neatly trimmed, and curled with scented wax ; while the ruddy glow of health and exercise bloomed upon his downy cheeks, and his blue eyes, almost too soft for a man, were turned in silent admiration towards the fair Avis, even while his speech was directed to the queen. The latter observed it with in-

ward pleasure, pleased to find a confirmation of her suspicions, both in the actions of the knight and the lady; and there is assuredly nothing gives a lady more satisfaction than to discover the justness of her penetration in a love affair. From that moment the lovers' cause becomes her own, and she promotes their designs with as much earnestness as if it were for her own peculiar gratification and delight.

The rich habit of the knight was not less calculated to set off those advantages, which nature had bestowed upon his person. It was of French workmanship; his doublet was of sky-blue cloth of the finest texture, adorned with silver broderie; his lower habiliments of the same; his huseans or loose boots of doe-skin armed with gilt pricks, or spurs with a single point; a short silver-hilted sword hung gracefully by his left side, a small dagger in his girdle on the right, while in his hand he bore his plumed bonnet or cap.

He

He was the bearer of a message from the king, bidding the ladies to a select party on the Thames, to which the queen returned a most gracious acquiescence : the weather was fine, clear, and inviting, and nothing could possibly be more agreeable than such an excursion, for the banks on both sides the river were inconceivably beautiful and picturesque. Commerce, at that period, had not covered the waters with her numerous and richly-laden arks, as at the present day ; coals were not then in use, wood being the chief fuel consumed ; and therefore the black barges, which now line the banks for a considerable extent, adding to the wealth of the city, but not to its beauty, more especially above London-bridge, the only one then over the Thames, and built entirely of wood, did not then disfigure the river. Tall trees and beautiful verdure bordered this deep, broad, and gentle stream, which may properly be ycleped a cornucopia to

this city, seeing how productive and lucrative is its traffick to the country.

The horses were already caparisoned, and the gaily-liveryed grooms and squires were leading the prancing steeds to and fro in the inner court of the Tower Royal; and at last the king, accompanied by the baron de Lacy, his son sir William, and three other nobles of high degree and favour, who were to be of the company, descended to the court below, where they were speedily joined by the queen, her favourite Avis, and her ladies of honour; and now began the doffing of caps, and bowing and courtesying; which ceremony being ended, the king gave his hand to Matilda, at the same time paying her a compliment, and saluting her cheek; and she being mounted, her ladies received the same compliments from the nobles; and the gallant sir William de Lacy had the honour of saluting the fair Avis, which the queen perceiving, smiled significantly at her confidante, saying—“Une rose vaut cinquante pavots!”

pavots *!" which caused deep blushes on the cheek of the lady, although the meaning of the queen's expression, and the confusion of Avis, was an enigma to all; nevertheless the knights bowed, and the ladies simpered, for royal words are precious, and often, like antiques, more valued from the ignorance of their meaning and intent.

The ladies being all mounted, there was now a struggle among the nobles which should have the honour of holding the king's stirrup—a circumstance, however puerile and ridiculous, that was mightily enjoyed by the king, who laughed heartily, waiting patiently the issue of the scuffle beside his steed; although his squire, who held the bridle, could have easily assisted him. Sir William de Lacy was the fortunate victor in this momentous conflict, which circumstance he owed as much to the co-operation of his father, as to his own exertions.

"*By God's birth* †! sir knight," said
Stephen,

* One rose is worth fifty poppies.

† Stephen's usual oath, according to the old chroniclers.

Stephen, patting him on the shoulder, “an thou dost overcome thine enemies as readily as thou hast thy friends, losing more sweat from thy brow than blood, I shall marvel an thine honours and thy life do not endure longer than thy spurs!”

“ May it prove thus, my liege,” replied sir William; “ and may your grace command my humble services,” and bowing, he quitted the king’s side, and mounted his charger.

The whole cavalcade were presently on their way to the river, while numberless gazers at the doors and windows of their habitations, as well as in the streets, cheered them as they passed.

The king rode beside the queen, both graciously returning the loyal salutes of the multitude, and sir William de Lacy on the right hand of the fair Avis, conversing with her in the most gallant terms; nor did the sprightly maiden lack aught in wit or repartee; and her lively sallies ofttimes caused the regards of the queen to be

be directed towards her as they rode along; and the amiable expression of her looks were regarded by the knight as a proof of her good wishes, and his own consequent success.

Two barges, richly adorned, with banks of rowers in splendid liveries, received the party; and they glided gently down the river, still cheered by the crowd, who had hastily assembled on the bridge.

CHAPTER IX.

THE universal rejoicing and festivity which manifested itself throughout the realm, during the first months of Stephen's accession to the throne, began gradually to subside, and the pageantries, which gratified the popular curiosity, and pleasantly soothed for a time any disloyal feelings which the doubtfulness of the king's title might

might have given rise to among the lower orders, all passed away, and with them much of that favourable impression they were intended to produce. And now, notwithstanding the trifling opposition he at first encountered in obtaining the summit of his ambitious views, and supported as he was by the countenance and favour of the most puissant heads of the church, when he looked down from the height he had gained with so much facility, he beheld himself surrounded by innumerable dangers and difficulties. He saw, and not afar off, the gathering of the storm, which unhappily threatened to mar the present brightness and tranquillity which shone so delusively around him. To the barons he had granted much—nay, in almost every instance, had acceded to their own terms, although in this, it was evident he acted with more policy than sincerity. For his regal power and authority once established, he trusted, by his wealth, and the strength of his alliances, to be enabled to command

command the few who were not already bound by their interests to serve him, and suppress the factious.

But at that period, when every baron was a petty prince within his own domain, and, if possessing power and means, was seldom at peace with his weaker neighbours, feuds and party-spirit ran so high, that the very espousing of the royal cause by one party, was sufficient excuse for kindling the animosity of the other, who probably rejoiced in the offer of a fair opportunity for a rupture; this petty warfare being but a profitable pastime to the greater, who took advantage of every opportunity of plundering the lesser. Among those who first reared the bloody banner of faction, was Baldwyn de Redvers, who, fortifying the castle of Exeter, openly avowed himself the enemy of the newly-elected king and all his liegemen, boldly calling him the usurper of the lawful rights of his cousin Maude, and all his partisans traitors to their country, against whom

whom it would be laudable and just for every true man to raise his sword.

Such a daring and inflammatory avowal quickly spread itself in every quarter, and decided those who were before wavering in doubt, or won over those who were already inimical to the government, who, too weak to lead or raise a faction themselves, readily embraced the present opportunity, and followed the treasonous call to arms.

The unwelcome tidings of this revolt was soon made known to the king, who lost no time in calling a council of war, and with that policy and decision for which he was remarkable, issued his commands for immediately summoning a sufficient force to quell the insurrection.—

“ And we,” said the king, addressing the council with the warmth of feeling characteristic of a soldier, “ though surrounded by so many brave nobles and gallant knights, whose loyalty makes them to feel our cause their own, and whose fealty and

and tried valour alike claim the honour of leading our forces to chastise the traitorous De Redvers, yet we, in person, do intend to marshal forth the troops, and lead them on. His foul and calumnious breath hath sullied our honour, and impeached our right, and even our royal sword shall answer his defiance, and punish his audacity. This is our resolve. And now let each depart in all expedient haste, assemble his men-at-arms without delay, and rendezvous before the traitor's hold; so speedily we'll make this disloyal knave bend his stubborn neck beneath our feet. Away—we long to tread out this dangerous little spark, which unregarded may soon blaze out, and inflame the minds of our disaffected subjects."

Upon which the nobles and knights, having signified their zeal, and promised prompt assistance, separated, each instantly setting out for his own domain, to gather together his armed retainers for the approaching conflict.

Among

Among others who evinced their readiness to punish the disaffection of Baldwyn de Redvers, none was more prominent in shew of loyalty and affection to his liege lord and sovereign, than Hubert de Lacy, who immediately upon the breaking up of the council, summoned Nicol Arnot, his confidant, and ordered his steed to be forthwith caparisoned, and himself, and all his officers and servitors who were then sojourning at Tower Royal, to equip with the utmost dispatch, in order to proceed to his baronial castle; and one short hour saw them all prepared, and, in company with many other nobles, bidding adieu to the festivities and pleasures of the metropolis, they issued from the city gates; and on the evening of the second day, when within a few hours ride of his castle, De Lacy dispatched a vassal as avant-courier, to advertise the warder of his approach.

As he drew nigh the vaw-mure, or outward wall, the guard stationed on the bican

bican or watch-tower described him approaching, and recognizing him by his arms and livery, instantly gave notice to the warder, who upon the vassal's advancing and winding his horn, threw open the portal, and gave him free ingress and hearty welcome.

“ And how fares our noble lord and master, the invincible De Lacy ?” said the warder, with such a tone of earnestness and genuine respect, that none who heard could doubt his attachment and fidelity to the baron. He was a stout, burley man, with an honest breadth of countenance, that beamed with health and goodwill. Fifty winters had somewhat thinned his locks, and blanched his curling beard and mustachios ; but half a century spent in a hardy and warlike career, appeared rather to have added to the natural strength of his brawny well-knit frame, than bowed him with its weight ; and both on account of his valour and experience he was justly esteemed by the politic De Lacy.

“ The

“ The baron,” replied the vassal to the bluff warder’s inquiry after his health, “ is surpassing well, as thou shalt soon have opportunity of witnessing, for my lord follows not far behind in my track, with all his train. An hour or twain will bring them hitherwards.”

“ I’faith so near?” said the warder, in surprise mingled with delight at this intelligence; “ I marvel then there is something evil brooding. He is not wont to return so unexpectedly, though, God wot, he hath had a long, yet doubtless a merry holyday time on’t.”

“ Perchance, coming so soon, so unheralded,” said the vassal, hesitatingly, “ all is not exactly (that is for my lord’s reception) in proper order?”

“ Hold thy peace, boy,” said the warder, slapping the other on his breast with the back of his broad hand, as it were in gentle rebuke; “ didst ever know Jean-not de Cordonne backward in the performance of his office? By St. George, there

there shall no grass grow beneath the feet of the noble De Lacy's vassals while I have the honour to command them—there shall be no slovenly lack of discipline or duty. All goes on here as regularly as the uprising and setting of the sun."

" Nay—but——"

" Well—well," interrupted the good-natured warder, preventing his apology, " say no more—say no more, but content ye that all within these walls is in such good trim, that the king even might look with admiration on such order: nor shall it ever be otherwise," added he, with a tincture of pardonable pride, " while Jeannot de Cordonne hath the rule of it."

" There cannot be a more proper man," said the vassal: but Jeannot appeared not to listen to this complimentary concession.

" Prithee, boy," said he, " comes Nicol Arnot with the baron?"

" He does," replied the vassal; " and (a word in thine ear) there hath been a little hurly-burly, or so, betwixt that dog and

and his master! Thou may'st stare—but by St. Winifred, 'tis true! nay, mine eyes cheated me, an I did not see the baron raise his hand."

"Did he strike the knave?" interrupted Jeannot, eagerly.

"Nay, but he seemed to threaten him; and I distinctly heard his angry voice, though somewhat less than a furlong off."

"By the rood! I would that he had beat him soundly," said Jeannot. "He is a very devil's bird—a plotter of mischiefs, and I like him not. I marvel much the good baron is so deluded by his duplicity. But the rankest weeds do often grow nearest the sweetest flowers!"

"Thank Heaven!" cried the vassal, "we were not honoured with his company to sour the sweets of our pleasures at the Tower Royal."

"No?"

"No! by our lady! Jeannot de Cor donne, was it not a blessing? He was employed (and most truly for our especial benefit)

benefit) by his grace, the king, on some private mission to the good bishop of Salisburie—at least, so it was bruited at court; and I have heard he was almost choked with the pride which swelled within him at the honourable appointment; and we were not a whit less pleased at his riddance. Oh! but we had a rare, roystering time on't! Such feasting, revelries, and pageants! Eating, drinking, singing, dancing, and sleeping, was our daily business! Hard work, truly, for our heads, while our hands were idle for lack of employment. Foregad! de Cor donne, but that city is a famous place for good living! Why, wouldest thou credit it? as I'm a sinner, we drank wine at two pennies the pint! and his grace (God bless him!) paid the shot. In truth, he hath a power of riches, and the baron, I can tell thee, is mighty great with him: and who dare gainsay he is not a proper king, and fit to wear a crown, who treats his loyal subjects with such good fare!"

Having thus concisely disburthened himself of his modicum of news, and satisfied the warder that there had been a great irregularity and want of proper discipline among his lord's retainers, while sojourning at the royal court, and furthermore, raised his curiosity with sundry surmises upon their hasty departure from London, without advancing a single satisfactory supposition or fact of the true cause, the vassal led his weary beast to his stall, where having safely lodged and provided him, he repaired to the buttery-hatch, or larder, to satisfy the cravings of his own appetite.

In the mean time, Jeannot de Cordonne marshalled out the whole garrison, observing the utmost precision, for the respectful reception of the baron and his train, in due form, and with all the honours due to one of his exalted rank.

He had scarcely concluded his operations, and delivered to each his particular orders and injunctions, when the cheering
and

and warlike music of the baron's heralds rang in the air, and summoned him to throw wide the gates for De Lacy's entrance. The trumpets within loudly responded to the challenge; the drawbridge was lowered, and at the same moment Jeannot de Cordonne appeared at the head of the vassals, bareheaded; when the heralds, with the party of archers who had preceded the baron some hundred yards, divided and arranged themselves on either side the drawbridge, forming two lines, through which De Lacy rode at a round trot into the court-yard of the castle, saluted by the martial sounds of the clang-ing trumpets, and the loud cheers of the vassals; his squires, bearing his broad target, emblazoned with his arms, and his spear and battleaxe, followed; with one hundred men, arrayed in shirts of mails, with pikes and bills; and last of all came Nicol Arnot, without a smile or word of recognition to welcome his return; indeed the downcast look, and unusually gloomy

brow of the veteran squire, was not calculated to excite any pleasure in the breasts of those who were all and one prejudiced against him; nor had the post of prime favourite and confidential body squire, which he enjoyed, the least influence over the sentiments of the vassals, with whom his overbearing and abuse of the baron's confidence and favour rendered him most cordially despised.

As he crossed the bridge, the two lines advanced—formed—closed up the rear, and galloped in. The long oaken tables were now speedily covered with the plain, but wholesome (and to the vassals, not unwelcome) fare, which had been hastily prepared for their entertainment, and which needed no better sauce than the keenness of their hearty appetites.

In the mean time, whilst they were so pleasantly employed, baron de Lacy, even before unarming, or partaking of any refreshment, summoned the warder and the various officers of his house, and held a council,

council, briefly explaining the cause of his sudden arrival at the castle, the urgent necessity of prompt measures, and concluded by commanding them forthwith to call to arms the knights, the vavasours, ceorls, and villeins, and every individual whose tenure was held by service of arms, and assemble them on the morn of the morrow, in order to set forth and join the royal standard, in the expedition against the castle of Exeter.

CHAPTER X.

IT was at a late hour on the same night of his arrival, that De Lacy, harassed with the unremitting exertion and fatigues of the day, entered his chamber, and throwing aside his large wrapping cloak, and cap of fox-skin, he cast himself listlessly on an elegantly-carved oaken couch, co-

vered with embroidered cushions of Norman fabric. He had laid aside, for a few short hours, the heavy armour he wore on his arrival, and now appeared in a plain *gambeson* (a military vestment, composed of divers folds of linen, stuffed with cotton, and covered with chamois leather), ordinarily worn in those days beneath the suit of chain-mail.

But a little time had he spared to the refection of his body, and the remaining hours had been dedicated to the inspection of his forces, already collected within the walls—their accoutrements, weapons, horses; and without meaning, or giving offence to the vigilance of that infallibly correct and industrious disciplinarian, Jeannot de Cordonne, the watchful “master’s eye” supervised every particular department. The armoury was soon dismantled of the bright and shining pikes, bills, glaives, morions, helms, and targets, which illumined its dingy oaken walls with the radiance of their reflected beams, and,

and, with the hauberks, and common cuirasses, and breast-plates for the villeins, were all ranged round the court-yard, ready for harnessing the men, and glittering and flashing in the red light of the large fire, which sent up its long, forked flames, whirling and roaring in the midst of the place, where it was kindled for the use of the armourers, who, stripped to their skins, with no other covering than a pair of coarse woollen drawers, were labouring lustily in their vocation, repairing and rivetting the armour wheresoever accident or wear had rendered their assistance necessary ; whilst the men, scattered here and there in groups, were busily occupied in cleaning their arms, or grooming and dressing their cattle for the combat. In fine, every division of the castle exhibited the bustle, confusion, and noise of a hasty preparation, and which endured, almost unceasingly, till break of day : and, however inclined to repose the baron De Lacy might have been, he

found it utterly impossible to woo the blessing of sleep, while such a clanking and ringing of arms, the loud, hoarse voices of the vassals bawling to each other, and the clattering and neighing of the prancing steeds, pealed in such a chaos of discord through the place.

The dying flame of the nearly-exhausted lamp, which had illumined, now winked and fluttered in one corner of the spacious apartment, its feeble ray rendered unnecessary by the broad glare of light from the court below, which poured its rich red stream through the narrow casements, throwing up a strong reflection upon the engroined and fretted compartments of the ceiling.

As De Lacy lay stretched on his couch, he appeared watching the fitful changes of the shadows, as they were affected by the flickering flames below; but he was absorbed in a profound, although, judging by the placid smile that played upon his face, not unpleasant, reverie, when he

was

was suddenly startled by a figure stalking cautiously betwixt him and the light.— “Who goes?” cried he, hastily rising from his recumbent posture.

“ ‘Tis I!” laconically answered the gruff, sullen voice of Nicol Arnot, the surrounding din having drowned the slight noise occasioned by his entrance, and he proceeded, without deigning further notice, towards the brazen tripod, in order to feed the lamp from a small stone flagon he bore in his hand.

“Thou mayest spare thy pains, Arnot,” said the baron, “for the light of the fire will serve me well till daylight breaks. And, Nicol, mind thee, the moment sir Gerard Dubois arrives, with his band of archers, to bid him hither. Tell Jordain to see the links of my long-armed gauntlets be properly repaired and polished; and likewise examine the wadding of L’Astre’s poitrinal * be in such a condition

* Poitrinal—breastplate for the horse.

that the beast may not be galled therewith."

" 'Tis done," replied Nicol Arnot.

" 'Tis well; an hour hence then I will arm, for my eager spirit is restless till I am in that field, where my trusty glaive will probably reap me a harvest of golden ears!"

" Nor shall mine be idle in the strife, and perchance Fortune may not deem me too mean an object for her favours—I too may glean a little!" said the squire, with a tone and an intrusive bearing that but ill suited with his condition, or the respect he owed his lord and master; but De Lacy's confidant seemed rather to court than fear rebuke.

" Thou speak'st boldly!" remarked the baron, with surprise.

" I can act bolder!" shortly replied Arnot.

" What mean'st thou?" said De Lacy, with increased astonishment—" what wilt thou? what is the import of this strange language?

language? This to me! Speak, knave! give utterance to the workings of thy mind, be they good or evil. Thou art not as thou art wont to be; what hath chafed thee? Is not the gloom of the morning's rebuff yet passed away?"

"No," sharply retorted Nicol; "nor will it ever!"

"Indeed!"

"The tale of my disgrace is broached to all; and in every knave's face I meet, I read mockery and derision, smirking at my expence; and knowing not how firm a footing I hold here, from this rupture they unwittingly augur my downfal!—I can feel a wrong deeply too!"

"Are thy feelings so refined?" said De Lacy, smiling contemptuously—"Pshaw! get thee gone, knave. Let me have no more of this—To thy duty——"

"My duty!" repeated Nicol; then lowering his voice—"I never yet neglected it—I have served, my lord—for years have served thee but too well; and my

reward hath been menaces and angry upbraiding!"

The baron half rose from the couch, but curbing his kindling anger at his squire's audacious speech, he resumed his recumbent posture—"Give thy tongue full play, a' God's name—that it may the sooner have a holyday!" said the baron.

"But I will serve no more!" continued Nicol; "the time hath now arrived when I may signalize myself, and gain the proud height my ambition points to. Baron de Lacy," said he, advancing with a firm step towards him, "thou art not more weary of my service than I of bondage—Free me then—Confer on me the honourable order of knighthood, which my skill in arms and secret services equally deserve—nay, demand from thine hand—and I will seek my fortune in the field—"

"Hell and the devil!" exclaimed the furious De Lacy—"This from thee!—am I awake, or this the mockery of a dream?

or

or have I long been dreaming, and now lately 'wakened, and found a selfish and ambitious man, in the place of the faithful and obsequious Arnot?—the servile, cringing cur, changed on the sudden to a wily fox? A knight! in troth thou would'st make a stalwart, gallant knight! Why, Arnot, what unruly devil doth possess thee?—What next will thy unrespectful audacity—ambition as thou call'st it—ask? The half my barony perchance would be too limited for the mightiness of thy desire?"

"Hark'ee, sir baron!" cried the squire, with a fierce undaunted look, roused by the other's bantering. "I despise thy scoffing and jeering—but I will not tamely submit to be the butt of any one, be he knight—baron—or whatsoever degree he may. And since thou talk'st of thy barony—who helped thee to it? I—I—Arnot—who destroyed the heir that thou mightest hold undisturbed the lands thou hast wickedly usurped. Yea—Arnot—the 'cringing, servile cur,' thou holdst in such

such contempt. Is this gratitude to spurn the wretch whose hand hath dealt thy daggers—whose suppliant neck hath been thy stepping-stone to wealth and honour—and now——”

“ Slave!” exclaimed De Lacy in a voice of thunder—“ darest thou beard me thus, or bandy words with me as freely as with thy fellows? Away! from my presence, ere I strike thee to the earth——”

But neither sword nor poignard, nor other offensive or defensive weapon had De Lacy at hand, to put his threat in execution, or intimidate the bold, presumptuous confidant of his villainy. While on the other hand, Nicol Arnot, standing betwixt the baron and the door, apparently to prevent any ingress, placed his hand with a firm grasp on the hilt of a basillard, or long dagger, which was slung on his right side, and fixing his dark eyes upon the exasperated baron—“ De Lacy!” he replied, “ I have fearlessly advanced thus far. Neither furious look nor angry menace

nace have power now to move me from my purpose—I have served thee truly, and only demand my just reward—grant it, or suffer the consequences of exasperating an abused and vindictive man. Raise me to honour, or my breath shall tarnish thine—poison thy yet fair, unspotted name with damning truths, and cast thee lower than thy obsequious slave!"

" And can'st thou—darest thou do this?" asked De Lacy, in a voice tremulous with anger, but ill-suppressed, which blanched his cheeks and quivering lips. " Is this the way my bounty is requited? —Wilt thou be the viper to sting the bosom that hath cherished thee, and sully the brightness of a name, the reflected radiance of which hath been like a genial sun wherein thou hast basked in the plenitude of ease and luxury? Too sure thou art bewildered by some hellish fantasy, which makes thee run headlong upon thine own destruction; for do not thy fortunes

fortunes solely depend upon the stability of mine? Seek not then to overthrow them for thine own sake; or by accusing me of crimes, and divulging the dangerous secrets in thy keeping, cause thine own destruction, as an accomplice in my guilt. Reflect, Arnot: ponder well, ere thou dost rush heedlessly into the pitfall thy blind and unworthy passions have dug beneath thy feet!"

"Thy speech was ever sooth and mild, sir baron," replied Arnot, assuming a gentler tone, in unison with his master's; but his resolves were unshaken by the danger which De Lacy would fain have persuaded him was ready to fall upon his devoted head, if he swerved from his sworn allegiance to him—"But," continued he, "for myself, I fear nor harm nor scaith—thanks to thy gracious solicitude for my welfare. I am in all prepared to pass the severest ordeal of justice. I have pondered well, and know that I can sting unharmed, for whate'er *my* crimes, I have been but as a scourge

scourge in thy cruel hand—a mere obedient tool of thy caprice. 'Tis therefore for thee, De Lacy, 'to ponder well,' ere thou refuse the boon I ask in reward for long and faithful services. I wish not to die the mean and abject—unknown slave I've lived. Thou hast taught me to pant for fame!"

"And thou would'st have me blur the honour and purity of knighthood, by conferring its proud title upon such a vile reptile as thee!" exclaimed De Lacy, biting his lip in rage.

"Nay, more," replied Arnot, unmoved by this scornful language; "fearing that thou, who made me that 'vile reptile,' hast not sufficient godliness and worth to ensure the purity of that proud title, I must further crave thy puissant intercession with the king, to confirm with his royal sword that honourable distinction. Nay, spit forth thine hate in harmless words, but curb thy rage—offer no violence," continued Arnot, half unsheathing his basillard,

basillard, as the exasperated baron rushed towards him with his clenched hand to strike him down: “I can use this weapon, as thou hast taught me, against the unarmed and helpless.”

De Lacy recoiled in horror from the cold-blooded, deliberate villain, whose piercing eyes watched his every motion, and whose hand was ready to execute the purpose of his threat.

“And remember,” continued he, “there still lingers a living witness, a miserable victim, of thy treachery, whose trembling voice can yet repeat her many wrongs, and hold me out in my allegations against thee. Brisset too still lives, and would give all his little wealth to have his tender conscience relieved from its oppressive burthen. But no more—my mind’s made up; if thou dost still refuse to seal my tongue, I will divulge—nay, more, I——”

“Seize the slave!” exclaimed De Lacy; and on the instant the arms of the surprised and struggling Nicol Arnot were pinioned

pinioned behind him by the strong, nervous grip of Jeannot de Cordonne, who had thus opportunely rushed into the chamber to the rescue of the incensed but unguarded baron, who was incapable of offering any resistance to the wily Arnot, who had, as he imagined, taken every precaution to prevent interruption, having even formed some trivial excuse for removing the guard, who was usually stationed within call in the gallery or anti-chamber, and moreover placed much dependence on the noise and commotion which reigned without; but that which he so confidently relied upon as a safeguard, eventually proved his ruin, for it prevented him from hearing the warder's approach, and consequently from the chance of making his escape.

Indeed on any other occasion than the present, when all form and etiquette were set aside in the pressing expedition of affairs, the warder would not have ventured to break in so abruptly upon the baron's

baron's privacy unannounced, or uncalled for, the more especially when he was engaged in consultation with his confidant; but Nicol Arnot was the honest warder's bane, and he always considered, however erroneously, that the baron was as good and brave as he always appeared in the field, and that he was the dupe of the artful Arnot, who was universally regarded as the vile source from whence sprang the casual petulance, or ill humour, of the baron; and having been informed by the guard that Nicol Arnot had removed him, so unusual a proceeding naturally awakened his surprise, and apprehending some design upon his honoured lord, he summoned the baron's squires, and resolving to run the risk of De Lacy's displeasure, if his zeal should be construed into intrusion, under the pretence that it was the hour to arm in readiness for the field, happily arrived in time to render Arnot's designs abortive.

Unarmed, and speedily bound by the
trusty

trusty warder, all the fire ambition had kindled in his breast, and his haughty bearing, seemed to have wholly deserted him; with his head sunk upon his breast, he preserved the most sullen silence. He who threatened and exacted so imperiously his own conditions, foolishly believing he had such absolute controul, saw himself unexpectedly dwindled to the most abject state of despair, for he had nothing to expect from the mercy of his offended master.

For a few short moments succeeding his apprehension, not a word was uttered; the warder held his prisoner, while the two squires stared in mute astonishment; and De Lacy paced up and down the chamber, his breast agitated with a thousand contending emotions. At last, observing Jeannot de Cordonne patiently awaiting his commands, he exclaimed, in a sharp, hasty tone, as if the sight of such an object pained him—“Bear him hence, quickly! load him with chains, and cast him

him in the lowest dungeon ! there let his carcase rot !”

The warder dragged him away, and the squires followed, heartily rejoiced at an opportunity to escape from the presence of the baron, lest they should suffer in the violent ebullition of his rage.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTHOUGH an historian, in his vocation, is universally allowed to possess the qualifications of ubiquity, to be here, there, and every where, and to be gifted with the centocular powers of Argus, yet is he wanting in the many arms of Briareus, and the fabled tongues of gossipping Rumour, to relate all he sees and hears at once. The courteous reader must therefore kindly excuse an impossibility (which if overcome would probably only prove a confusion

confusion of tongues), and permit us to retrograde forty-eight hours or so, to that precise time when De Lacy and the several barons rode forth from the city gates, to assemble their forces, and the king's royal proclamation was issued for the mustering of his own troops, who were quartered in divers parts of the city, at a grievous expence to many honest victuallers, hostellers, and publicans dwelling therein.

But those "*men of warre*," the Flemings, whom the policy of Stephen had levied out of Flanders, with the savings of his right good uncle, Henry Beauclerc, in order to counterbalance and keep in awe the overweening power of the barons, were the best trained soldiers, and the hardest drinkers in the country, and their riotous drunkenness and unlicensed debauchery was a constant source of trouble, and withal a sore scandal to the sober and reputable citizens of London; but neither the two bailiffs, the then supreme authorities,

rities, nor the king himself, would give ear to any complaints against his staunch defenders, whose offences were winked at, and whose conduct consequently grew daily worse, and being thus unbridled, branched forth in all the wild luxuriance of unrestrained licentiousness.

At the eastern extremity of the city, near Aldgate, stood a large, commodious, and well-frequented hostelrie, known by the sign of the Wine Skin (a *bona-fide wine skin*, stuffed with straw, and daubed with an attractive flame colour), which dangled (a plaything of the winds) from some twelve inches of rusty chain, just below the window of the first floor.

On entering the low door, supported on either side by Bacchanals and grapes, rudely carved, a spacious room displayed its blackened walls to view, hung round with caps, swords, and jackets, pertaining to the company assembled, who were quaffing their wine, and singing merrily round a large fire of green wood, which blazed

blazed and crackled in the midst of the red-tiled floor.

The party was mostly composed of Flemings and Bretons, archers and warlike men of the king's party ; and in one corner sat a tall, meagre, half-starved friar, barefooted, with a most acrimonious aspect of sanctity and mortification.—“Man of war!” said he, turning to one of the Flemings, who had clenched some asseveration by a thundering oath, “swear not so loudly nor so lewdly. There is neither courage nor magnanimity in an oath ; it is the coward's weapon and the liar's subterfuge.”

“Man of peese,” replied he to whom this remonstrance was addressed, “holt your peese, or I sal sveal more. Go breach your pader-nosders and afe-Marys, olt man; go cound your beets. Vat duyvels! sal you mak me zermens. Cot tam ! I sal sveal ane tousan oats and trink too ! Hah, hah ! shak your peart and rollt your oogen—your eyes, olt man ! Gerrit Oosterwyk

terwyk is ane man of war—is’t niet? soe lat him fight, and trink, and sveal; and you, man of peese, sall breach, and vast, and bray, and knog your potty apout mit your robe—yaw—and croan your croans als you bleese! Bote you most niet bood your hant atop mine mout, or I sal pide you—zie daar!—hah! hah! I sal!”

A loud and general laugh followed this half angry, half jocose sally of the Fleming’s, intermingled with sundry exclamations of—“Dat is coot!”—“Bravo! zeer goed!”—“Well said, my man of war!”—“Wel gezegd, myn kammeraad!” and a score others, from as many speakers, seasoned with a few oaths, which made the friar turn up the whites of his large projecting eyes in horror, at the profanity of the crew that surrounded him; but despairing of amending them by his admonition, he uttered a groan of commiseration, and finished the scanty, frugal dole the hosteller had bestowed on him, without offering further comment.

“ Holt

"Holt dere! Jan Hakkebort, you vish!" cried Gerrit Oosterwyk, addressing one of his boon companions, who had just raised the bowl to his lips, "you sal trink it all-ob. Cot tam! I sal haf niets to vet mine troat mit. Duyvels oogen! you sug enoff voor twenty mans!" continued he, eyeing with open mouth the dregs of the bowl. "Here's ane tam liddle drob! Vhy, Jan, you haf ane liddle hell in your pelly, I dink; you leaf niets more dan de boddom te loog at. Vell! here's ane helt, myne kammeraaden! ane coot helt;" and the bowl was drained in a moment. "Yaw, yaw, dat is coot!" said he, smacking his lips. "Holloa! myn host, anoder liddle powl voor me! Suel, suel! quick, myn coot man! Now, Lou van Zwaartbeeken, zing ous ane zang."

Hereupon all eyes were instantly turned towards Lou van Zwaartbeeken, a dark swarthy little Fleming, who, without any preliminary excuses, instantly commenced the following beautiful words, in a strong

guttural voice, bearing more resemblance to the cawing of a crow, or a concert of frogs, than the warble of a nightingale:—

SONG.

“ Alderbeste kammeraad,
 Ons vermaak gaat vast en zeker,
 Door het minnen van den beker,
 Die ons nooit verlegen laat
 Laffe zielen
 Mogen knielen
 Voor de blonde Cipria :
 Wy, wy volgen Bacchus na !

“ Die vryd——”

Lou van Zwaartbeeken had proceeded thus far, when his tuneful lay was interrupted by a loud, hearty, irrepressible laugh.

In an instant the eyes of the Flemings, scowling with anger, were directed towards the intruder, whose fit gradually subsided into an inaudible convulsion, which obliged the offender to hold in his sides with both his hands.

“ Holle !”

“Holle!” exclaimed the half-drunken Jan Hakkebort, drawing his knife; “kom you here to mog us, scoontrel? I sal cud your dong out!”

“Peace a’ God’s name! peace!” cried the friar, interposing his long, lank form between Hakkebort and the offender; “slay not thy brother in wrath!”

“Broder! tam broder! de scoontrel mine broder?”

“Bah!” cried Gerrit Oosterwyk, putting him back with his hand; “sal ve gill ane man voor ane laugh?”

“Excuse me,” said Ralphe (for it was no less than the good-humoured, honest-hearted nephew of Brisset), recovering his breath and speech—“excuse me, right valiant sirs! but of a truth I was so tickled by the oddity of thy comrade’s chaunt, that by the mass! I should have bursten had I not given vent to my humour; albeit thou mayst plainly see the tears of penitence have oozed out of mine eyes even in my mirth. So whip me! an I be

not sorry for the offence ; but in verity I did think thy comrade was singing for a wager with a flask of wine in his throat, his words gurgled and rattled so comically."

This joking apology, however, far from appeasing the Flemings, only aggravated the offence, by raising a laugh at the expence of Lou van Zwaartbeeken, who, drawing his knife, rushed furiously towards the inconsiderate Ralphe, followed by Jan Hakkebort. A general uproar and confusion ensued, in which the meditating voice of the friar was drowned in the overflowings of rage and remonstrance.

But Gerrit Oosterwyk, notwithstanding he felt the affront offered to his national tongue, was a brave and generous man ; and seeing that Ralphe was already struggling in the grasp of the infuriate Zwaartbeeken, he unceremoniously seized Jan Hakkebort by the waist and collar of his doublet, and raising him up, lifted him over the long oaken table, with the same facility a huge mastiff would take a puppy in

in his jaws.—“ Duyvelsbaart en oogen ! Jan Hakkebort, gif de carl vair blay !” cried he. “ Is niet von Flamand voort twenty England’s mans ? Stant bag dere, kammeraden ; vair blay ! Dat is vell—dat is vell !”

This seasonable interposition of the honest Fleming intimidated his countrymen from venturing to advance to the succour of their comrade, who appeared to be well matched by the robust, muscular frame of the young countryman, who succeeded in wresting the long knife from his antagonist’s hand, at the same time slightly, though unintentionally, wounding him ; but in the act of disarming Zwaartbeeken, Ralphe lost his advantage in the struggling hold, and was thrown a heavy fall.

“ Dat is coot !” exclaimed Gerrit Oosterwyk.

“ Wel gedaan !” said another.

“ ’Tis gewonnen !” cried a third.

But scarcely were these words uttered, than the agile Ralphe bounded from the earth again with the elastic lightness of a

blown bladder, and, like Antæus of old, seemed to have gained renewed strength from his mother earth; for, darting headlong upon his antagonist, with his whole weight centered in that one effort, he stretched him almost senseless upon the tiled floor of the hostelry.

The Flemings now observing that Ralphie wielded their comrade's knife, and fearing the consequences of his revenge, interposed betwixt Lou van Zwaartbeeken and his vanquisher.

"By St. George," cried the panting, and almost exhausted thrall, guessing the cause of this sudden movement, "ye do me wrong! True 'tis a Flanders blade I grasp, but it is in the hands of an Englishman, that scorns to take unfair advantage, even of an enemy. I do not hold thy comrade one, neither am I his; my foolishness hath wrought upon his rashness; I merely wished to defend myself, not harm him. To this brave and honourable man, I owe much for the vantage of fair play," and at the same time presenting

Zwaart-

Zwaartbeeken's knife to Gerrit Oosterwyk, he continued—" thou hast the best right to this weapon, for thou hast courage and moderation to use it."

" Dat is coot!" said the approving Gerrit.

" The Flemings now raised up Lou van Zwaartbeeken, whose hide being as tough as that of a rhinoceros, or a wine-skin, in recovering his breath, recovered all he had lost, and found himself as sound again as ever.

Ralphe approached, and offered him his hand in token of amity, which he received with a hearty, generous grip in his broad, brown paw, with a grunt like—
" Yaw—vel!"

" Henceforth let us be friends," said Ralphe : " thou shalt sing to thine heart's content, and thy friends' pleasure; and I, have the privilege of laughing for mine own."

" Yaw—yaw—'tis right vel!" said Gerrit Oosterwyk; " laugh till you borst, so

it blease you, yonker man, 'tis var bedder dan breaching," glancing at the friar : " here, vet your libs a liddle. Cot's truce ! vriend, but Lou van Zwaartbeeken haf squeedze you like as ane sponge."

Ralphe took the offered bowl, and drained the generous liquor to the health of Gerrit Oosterwyk and his comrades; and the jolly merriment which had been so unpleasantly interrupted, now resumed its sway with redoubled vigour; the joke was cracked—the song—the roundelay, and thundering chorus, sung with the greatest good-humour and fellowship by Fleming, Norman, Breton, and English, when a loud and alarming cry of " fire !" disturbed the revellers, who instantly arose in the utmost consternation, and rushed towards the door, hustling, swearing, and tumbling over each other.

The friar alone appeared unmoved by fear; he hastened not from the spot, but raising his right hand in a prophetic manner, while his left rested on his rude staff,

or

or cross—" Lo !" cried he, in a deep voice, " here is a judgment come upon ye for your profaneness and debasherie. The fire hath descended from the heavens to purify the sins of the children of the earth. Ye grovelling worms, in vain ye endeavour to crawl out of the reach of the dreadful decree which is denounced against ye. Ye must all perish—yea, even in thy drunkenness and folly !"

But neither Gerrit Oosterwyk nor Lou van Zwaartbeeken heard or rebuked him; they were too busy in effecting their escape to listen to his " breaching," as they termed it. Fortunately, however, the conflagration, which in reality did then rage with destructive fury on both sides the street, had not yet reached the hostellie, which, like the rest of the houses of London, was built entirely of wood, and roofed with common thatch, or, it would have proved fatal to the philosophic and fanatical friar, and likewise to Ralphe, the last of the revellers who fled. This tardiness

ness in escaping, however, arose entirely from a feeling of generosity ; for in the hurry of the retreat, no respect was paid to friend or foe ; and Ralphe observed that Jan Hakkebort, who had been so rudely repulsed by Oosterwyk, was lying fast asleep behind the long table, where he had been so dextrously laid by his comrade, and inspired by the genuine feelings of humanity, and pleased with an opportunity of the noblest revenge, Ralphe raised him with difficulty (for he was so overcome with sleep and liquor, that he could not arouse him), and bore him safely into the middle of the street, to the surprise and admiration of the Flemings, who bestowed on him the loudest, but by no means the most intelligible, commendations.

As for Gerrit Oosterwyk, who had already conceived a partiality for the youth, he felt a world of gratitude, and cordially pressing his hand, said to him, in a voice full

full of the truest feeling—" Dat is coot, myn vriend!"

Every one's attention, however, was directed to the fire, " which kindled," as the antiquary Stow saith, " in the house of one Ailward, neere vnto London Stone, and consvmed eastward to Aldgate, and westward to St. Erkenward's shrine, in Paul's church."

Fire-engines, more necessary then than now, when the improvements of building, and the less combustible materials used, render that calamity of less frequent occurrence, and not such extensive consequences, were not invented. The narrowness of the street in this instance made assistance impossible, if not useless; for the flames spread right across from building to building, and the little water-buckets which were filled at the river, were of little or no avail even in arresting the progress of the destructive element. Much property was consumed, and the inhabitants had scarcely time to escape; for it being

being near nine o'clock in the evening (a late hour in those days) the good citizens had all retired to rest.

The pious monks of Bermondsey too, saw with dismay a part of their revenue consumed in this awful visitation. For one Thomas Arderne had liberally bequeathed to that holy fraternity the church of St. George, in Southwark, with the sum of five shillings rent “ by the yeere,” out of the lands of London-bridge, which fell an easy prey to the devouring flames, being built entirely of timber.

At the foot of this wooden bridge, on the London side, there stood a magnificent mansion, pertaining unto sir Reginald de Travers, a knight of great wealth and renown, and held in much esteem by Stephen, by reason of his policy and valour, and firm adherence to his cause. On the first alarm of fire, the knight had sought the chamber of his only child—a beloved daughter; but finding it empty, and his hurried and repeated calls unanswered, he fled

fled (finding further delay dangerous) into the public street, eagerly inquiring of all he encountered for his daughter; and some of his vassals, who had rushed out on the first alarm, half dead with terror, and scarcely awake, informed him that the women had fled in the direction of Tower Royal, and doubtless their lady was with them.

Thither he sped in anxious haste; but how was the knight horror-struck when he learned that she had not been seen by any of them; and half frantic, he flew back again to his blazing mansion, determined to rescue his adored child, or sacrifice his life in the attempt. But by the time he arrived, the whole building was enveloped in one terrific blaze. It would have been madness to have ventured to gain an entrance; it would have been a certain and useless sacrifice of human life.

His friends, moved at his distress, had followed, endeavouring to persuade him of the possibility of her escape, and to mitigate

mitigate the anguish of the father's heart. But he was deaf to their friendly remonstrances, and struggled to be freed from the reasonable restraint which they kindly imposed upon him. His wild and despairing shrieks, as he hopelessly called upon his adored—his only child, froze their hearts. Fain would they have forced him from this scene of woe, but he would not quit the spot where he had left his soul's best treasure.—“ Give me my child,” he cried, “ my darling child !”

“ She lives—she lives !” exclaimed his exulting squire, rushing through the crowd, and in the extacy of his joy dropping at his master's feet, and embracing his trembling knees.

“ Thank God ! thank God !” fervently ejaculated the happy father, bursting into a flood of tears.

Returning immediately to Tower Royal, he there had the felicity of embracing his daughter; and while he gazed fondly on her animated countenance, as she recounted

counted him the miraculous manner of her escape, the storm of grief which had erewhile clouded his brow, and almost bursten his heart with insupportable forebodings, gradually gave way to the gentle calm of renewed joy.

Awakened almost at the same moment as her father, by the screams of her affrighted women, and the retreat of the household, the affectionate Myriol had descended a private staircase which led from her boudoir to a gallery below, at the extremity of which her father slept ; but finding it unoccupied, (for the same impulse had just then hurried him to hers, which he must have most inopportunely entered at another door the minute after she had quitted it), she therefore made the best of her way towards the principal gates ; but the flames and smoke arrested her progress, and in the utmost dismay she ran to the back part of the mansion, where there was a long gallery overlooking the river.

Thousands

Thousands were assembled on the opposite bank to view the conflagration, but none were near to lend their aid; and though she waved her veil incessantly, and called aloud, they seemed for a long time neither to observe or hear her. Her beating heart almost died within her. One end of the gallery was already in flames, and she began to despair of attracting attention to her perilous situation, when she perceived a sudden rushing and commotion towards the spot nearly opposite the mansion, and plainly observed them pointing towards her; and a small boat, with two men, almost immediately pushed from the bank, and rowing vigorously, soon arrived beneath the gallery.

The flames were now fast approaching from every side, and Myriol called aloud on them to be quick and save her.

“The nest is fired, but the young dove shall not perish!” cried one of them, and standing up in the boat, sprang eagerly forward, clasping hold of one of the rude columns

columns which supported the gallery, and began to ascend; but being unfortunately pierced with the iron spikes wherewith caution had guarded it—"Curse on the thorns!" cried he, wincing with pain, and losing his grasp, was instantly precipitated headlong into the river.

Myriol shrieked with terror. The other boatman, however, seeing the extremity of her danger, took no notice of his companion, who quickly rose to the surface of the water, and was swimming to the boat, but pitching up a rope, which was luckily lying in the bottom of the skiff, Myriol, with trembling hands, fastened it firmly to the gallery, and the youth by its aid presently ascended, and fixing the rope round her delicate waist, lowered her gently and safely on board the boat, which the fallen man had just gained in time to lend his assistance (and she here shewed the marks of his bleeding hands on her soiled robes); her liberator then descending, he pushed off, and politely demanded
whither

whither he should transport her, begging her at the same time to tranquillize her hurried spirits, for that all danger was past.

But her mind was so bewildered, and her heart fluttered so fearfully, that she had scarcely power to name the king's residence, when she swooned away. Of what further passed till her revival among her kind and happy friends, she was wholly unconscious ; nor could any other information be gained, than that two men had brought her to Tower Royal, and consigning her to the care of some of her distracted women, who were present on their arrival, and recognised their mistress, had gone away in the confusion almost unseen, and unrewarded.

CHAPTER XII.

MANY of those mortals who love to predict, and peep into futurity, began to croak upon the event of this calamitous fire, which, by the dark and abstruse rules of their calculation, was proved an unfavourable omen to the success of the enterprise which the king had undertaken against the traitor De Redvers. But the wisdom or fallacy of their forebodings will sufficiently develop itself in the course of the following veracious and luminous account of that chronicled occurrence.

On the morrow following, the king set forth, with a numerous body of knights and armed men, to lay siege to the castle of Exeter, where having safely arrived, he found his loyal barons and allies, with their several forces, impatiently awaiting his

his commands. The banner of De Redvers was displayed, flying in defiance, on the citadel; and his archers, slingers, and others, practised and well-disciplined in the art of casting the various missiles then used in warfare, manned the walls.

Having dispatched a formal challenge by the royal herald, to demand his surrender, De Redvers haughtily replied—
“ To the earl of Morton and Boulogne (for the title of king of these realms hath he unjustly usurped), bear this response ; that Baldwyn de Redvers holds himself his equal, and therefore hath he no right to command him—that Baldwyn de Redvers enjoys his lands and title by heirship, by the laws of William the Conqueror—that he is no usurper, and loving justice better than the earl, he hath espoused (as a true knight) the cause of Henry’s injured daughter, and set up his standard, in defiance of Stephen and all his partisans, who have, in raising him to the throne, forsworn themselves, and forgotten their allegiance.

allegiance. Nor shall his ‘grace’ (for so ye grace him, though, God wot, he hath nor grace nor faith !) prove his enemy a cur, who is to be beaten into fawning compliance. Tell him, Baldwyn de Redvers hath a strong hold, a firm heart, and a faulchion and friends that never failed him in the time of need! so let him strike, and God defend the right!”

“ By God’s birth,” cried Stephen, stung with rage at this unexpected answer, “ ’tis a bold reply!”

“ In truth is it so, your grace,” said Hubert de Lacy; “ and yet methinks the varlet would not crow so merrily, had he not friends to back his blustering. I should not marvel to behold a troop or so of traitors riding hitherwards !”

“ Think’st so, De Lacy ?” said the king, thoughtfully ; then, after a moment’s pondering, he continued—“ Well, well, it may be. At all events, it behoveth us to proceed briskly to our work, that the fray being ended, we may be prepared

prepared to entertain these honest friends in all courtesy when they do arrive; for they will doubtless be better pleased with a feast than a fray ;” and anon the trumpets rent the air with their hoarse blasts, and the general attack began. The wide field of armed bands rushed, like a sea of roaring billows, rudely impelled by the stormy winds of heaven, towards the frowning walls and lofty towers of the redoubtable castle, which sustained the shock like a mighty rock in the midst of the raging elements. Large fragments of stone were hurled, with destructive violence, on the compact bodies, as they approached the walls with their battering-rams, breaking through their cover of uplifted shields. Flights of arrows wounded the horses and their riders, and threw them into confusion. Dismounted horsemen, heavily armed, could scarcely make good their retreat, and many fell in the confusion, and were trampled to death beneath the feet of those who pressed to the

the charge on foot. Coursers were seen in every direction, with their flowing tails and manes floating wildly in the breeze, galloping and dashing along, without their riders, affrighted by the cries of the wounded, and the din of the rattling arms.

Stephen, armed *cap-à-pie*, in complete steel, with a huge battle-axe and shield, and mounted on an immense, large-boned, fiery war-horse, was riding up and down the ranks, attended by De Lacy and his squires, issuing his commands, directing the efforts of the engineers, and encouraging all by his confidence and presence. But the besieged, secure in their numbers, and the impregnable strength of their fortress, bravely repulsed the foe, and baffled all their attempts to make a breach, deluging them with a cataract of boiling pitch, water, stones, and destructive missiles, wherever they slung their warlike instruments to batter the walls. And the night came on without any ap-

fiercest fire must dwindle into nothing—so must they feed on each other, like hungry wolves, or famine bring down the stomach of their pride, and drive them forth. What saith De Lacy?"

" Your grace's view is just. We needs must conquer, if we starve them out. This is your grace's policy, but too tardy in its progress, I wot, for the eager spirit of your grace, which wills a prompter punishment than this proceeding promises."

" It doth—in truth, it doth," said Stephen; " and the rage this cause hath bred within us, will, for lack of vent, turn and feed upon ourself."

" Then let us forth and try our strength and skill this very night," replied De Lacy, " even at this dark and starless hour, when the foe rests secure in the belief that we are all reposing in our tents, fatigued with the great but useless efforts of the day. Yes, even now I would dispatch a chosen band to the rearward of the castle, which is backed with the thick umbrageous

brageous cover of a wood—and issuing thence with slow and cautious steps to evade the observance of the sentinels, who are, perchance, winking on their posts, fearless of danger from that well-guarded quarter, and then suddenly raising our escaliers, mount the walls, strike down all opposition, and having gained a footing, rush speedily to the castle gates, and throw them wide to welcome in our ready troops."

" 'Tis a bold scheme, and well deserves our commendation," said Stephen; " and to thy care and skill, De Lacy, be its execution given. Go forth, and single out in silence those whom thou shalt deem most worthy for this daring enterprise. Set forth, divided in small bodies, and form a large circuit in thy march, that not the slightest tread may strike upon the watchful ear of our enemy, and by alarming them, render our plans abortive. Let each man strictly conceal his shining arms beneath the dark cover of his cloak;

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brageous cover of a wood—and issuing thence with slow and cautious steps to evade the observance of the sentinels, who are, perchance, winking on their posts, fearless of danger from that well-guarded quarter, and then suddenly raising our escaliers, mount the walls, strike down all opposition, and having gained a footing, rush speedily to the castle gates, and throw them wide to welcome in our ready troops."

" 'Tis a bold scheme, and well deserves our commendation," said Stephen; " and to thy care and skill, De Lacy, be its execution given. Go forth, and single out in silence those whom thou shalt deem most worthy for this daring enterprise. Set forth, divided in small bodies, and form a large circuit in thy march, that not the slightest tread may strike upon the watchful ear of our enemy, and by alarming them, render our plans abortive. Let each man strictly conceal his shining arms beneath the dark cover of his cloak;

and, on pain of death, let not a word—nay, not a whisper, escape their lips; but, the leader of each separate body having first received his full instruction, bid them keep their eyes on him—and march—halt, or wheel, as his movements, and not his voice, shall command. And like some stream, which pursueth its devious course within the bowels of the earth, in silence and obscurity, and then suddenly gushes forth in an astounding cataract of foaming waters, so will ye approach, and break with irresistible force upon the dismayed few who shall be keeping their nocturnal vigils—and conquest shall crown ye with honour. Go forth, baron de Lacy, and success attend thee. Meanwhile, we will not be idle; all shall be ready to effect the proposed completion of thy project. Farewell! Prosperity be with thee!"

In the course of an hour, De Lacy, delighted with the command which devolved upon him, and which promised to distinguish him in the eyes of his partial prince,

prince, marched forth from the camp with his little band, followed at concerted intervals by others—each led by experienced veterans; and as the last company were lost in the darkness of the wood, which skirted the plain in the rear of the encampment, Stephen and the barons, who anxiously witnessed their departure, turned away in order to prepare for the intended grand manœuvre. But scarcely had they commenced their cautious operations, when the distant clashing of arms aroused their fears; and ere the scout, despatched to learn the cause of this alarm, had reached the wood, he was encountered by a breathless messenger, flying towards the camp with tidings of a surprise. A force, superior in numbers to their selected band, had rushed from an ambush upon them as they were silently stealing along, and fallen upon them sword in hand.

Caution and silence were of no longer avail—their designs were frustrated; the trumpets and drums therefore sounded to

arms, and the cavalry were speedily mounted and galloping to the succour of baron De Lacy; but the foe was on the alert, and expecting no less than a prompt rescue, had placed their spies to watch the motions of the king's troops, and the moment they began to muster, the signal was given for retreat, which was obeyed without loss of time or difficulty, for the valiant band, headed by De Lacy, had suffered dreadfully in the conflict, and could offer no opposition, while the bold baron himself was borne away in captivity.

Pursuit was vain, through the dark and intricate mazes of the wood; and when the cavalry reached it, they found the earth strewed with their killed and wounded comrades, and all traces of the subtle foe were lost. From the information gleaned from those that had fought and survived the action, it was proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it was a strong party of De Redvers' men, who had secretly issued from the castle, impelled,

elled, no doubt, by the same design with De Lacy, of taking their enemy by surprise ; and by making a sudden incursion upon them, rout and perchance put them to a disgraceful flight.

The king was enraged beyond measure at this unexpected overthrow of his hopes, and vowed the direst vengeance on the head of De Redvers, whenever he should fall into his hands.

“ Let able scouts and spies be stationed in every direction,” said the king ; “ we must—we will be more guarded in our future movements. It mads us to think our foe should find us so unprepared to meet and punish him,” and slapping his forehead, he strode up and down his tent, completely armed as he was (with the exception of his helm and gauntlets,) for the field. “ Much, much do we owe,” continued he, “ to our valiant De Lacy ; his vigilance hath shielded us from the blow, which our honour must have inevitably sustained in a surprise. That loyal

knight hath right nobly done, and we grieve to know that he hath lost his freedom, by displaying that courage which hath justly won our favour. 'Tis the meed a traitor hath bestowed on loyalty. But though De Lacy hath proved so unsuccessful in his bold design, we ought to rejoice, seeing that it hath at least been the means of foiling the cunning of our foe."

At this moment a horseman galloped up to the king's tent, and hastily changing words with the guards, hurried unbidden to the royal presence.

"What makes this haste? what tidings, good sir Reginald?" eagerly demanded the king; "do they purpose another sortie? by God's birth, but they will not find us winking on our post!"

"Not so, my liege," replied sir Reginald de Travers, "but I have sure intelligence of a strong force marching hitherward, to De Redvers' succour."

"Indeed!"

"'Tis

“ ‘Tis true.”

“ What numbers do they shew ?”

“ Some thousand strong, your grace.”

“ Learnt ye what traitor leads them on ? under what device and colour do they come ?”

“ The ‘ Bloody Hand.’ ”

“ On a field argent ?” quickly demanded the king.

“ ‘Tis even so, my liege,” replied sir Reginald.

“ ‘Tis a fair escutcheon for the base Conrad Villiers who bears it,” said the king. “ Now, by my halidome ! but we will make his head as bloody as his hand, and as pale as the field whereon ‘tis blazoned, shall the fear-stricken faces of his flying troops appear. To horse ! to horse ! my noble friends and stalwart knights ; draw out your shining glaives, and let each loyal brand be sheathed in the hearts of these treasonous knaves. An hour hence, day breaks, so let the dawning of heaven’s light behold us ready for the

combat, and let the sun's first rays be reflected in our coats of glittering mail."

Hereupon sir Reginald de Travers bowed, and quitted the royal tent, followed by some fifty noblemen and knights, who, in obedience to Stephen's commands, were speedily equipped and mounted, and ready with their several detachments in the field, galloping or marching, each to his particular station, to await the approach of baron Villiers and his troop, a thousand strong; while Stephen lost no time in appearing among them, to encourage them by his presence, and set them a laudable example, by the coolness and alacrity with which he made his arrangements, and rode from post to post.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE gay and sprightly morning, arrayed in garments of molten gold, came smiling over the distant hills, and cheered with her genial glances all-bountiful nature, whose vestments embroidered with the fairest flowers, and spangled with dew-drops, sparkled in her joyful beams. It was pity so fair and beautiful a morn should be the herald of a bloody fray; and the warbling and twittering of the feathered tribe, be drowned in the discordant clanking of warlike arms and mailed warriors, who were galloping to and fro in the tented field, eager for the appearance of the hourly-expected foe, to give them battle.

At this early hour, four or five pike-men were discoursing together at the entrance

trance of sir Reginald de Travers' tent, upon the last night's unfortunate encounter.—“By the mass,” said one of those who had been in the fray, “it was sharp work. We really thought, upon the first onset, that the trees were rising against us. I verily believe there was not a man in the band that ventured to fetch his breath for a minute or two. None dared wag a tongue, or whisper his fears; silence had been enjoined, and every thrall’s death-knell was in his mouth. We were all as mute as night, and as fixed as the trees around us. But the enemies had marked us, and in vain we cowered down to hide ourselves. The word to charge was given, and like magic, a hundred naked blades lightened the darkness around us. The baron de Lacy threw off his dark cloak, and we followed the movement in an instant: but no sooner had we advanced upon the foe, and met them hand to hand, than another party attacked us in the rear, and we were presently overwhelmed

whelmed with numbers, and thrown into confusion—it was one man to a whole field. Retreat was impossible—we were fighting in a circle, which, as our comrades fell, engirdled us in tighter and tighter. Never did I behold a knight fight so boldly, or deal such deadly blows, as our leader; at every stroke a man seemed to bite the dust: he struck lightning out of the arms that were raised against him, and fought in a circle of glory, formed by his own indomitable valour. But his sword proved treacherous, and breaking, yielded him a prisoner. It was a mercy he did not fall, or our good king would have missed so brave a knight."

"But he is now lost to us—at least for this campaign," replied another; "for De Redvers is too keen a fox to break the chains of one of the best hounds in the king's pack."

"Nay, but we have strength enough still, with a little cunning, to unkennel the fox," said the other.

"Well

“ Well said, red-muzzle !” cried a third, alluding to the bright red beard and mustachios of the last speaker : “ but, marry, methinks we have a small game to play first, seeing there is a trifling band of some thousand strong, who are tramping hitherwards, for our especial entertainment—fierce and hungry as a troop of howling wolves in December, for doubtless they’ve taken in more air than food in their march ! By the Lord ! ’twill be like carving blown-up bladders ! They’ll find our blades as keen as their own appetites, and ere they break their fast, we’ll break their heads.”

“ Perchance they are aware of our preparation to receive them.”

“ Aware ! then egad any *where* will be a better where than where we are ; and they were very noodles, to thrust in their noses where they’ll get a dressing, which their carcases may not find so pleasant a wear as they are aware of.”

“ We shall however have the disadvantage

tage of having an enemy both in van and rear," said another; "and while we are fighting Conrad Villiers, we shall have De Redvers come pricking behind."

"If it chance, as thou fearest, good red-muzzle, then must we teach them that we wield a two-edged sword, from the which a back-stroke is as fatal as a cut or a thrust. And an they do hem us in, they will be but as a harmless scabbard to a sharp sword."

"And we as useless as a sheathed blade."

"Not so; for the royal hand hath wit and courage to draw us out, and use us too."

"But truly I think the rebel hath more cunning than to quit his hold—and would rather lose what he hath not, than risk what he hath to gain it. Trust me, while we are at work, they'll look over the ramparts, and bite their lips; and we shall then plainly perceive that De Redvers' *forte* is not fighting!"

"Cot's truce! an' is id mine yonker vriend?"

vriend?" said Gerrit Oosterwyk, who was accidentally passing, and recognized the jocose Ralphe, who was amusing his companions with his merry humour.

"Yea, God mend us!" exclaimed Ralphe, shaking him heartily by the hand, "the self-same irreverent that had nigh gotten his weazond slit, for grinning at thy comrade's piping. Am I not changed?" turning about, and shewing himself: "yet in verity, only in the outward, having cast my old slough, or rather slipped into a new one, for my heart is as merry, and my tongue as glib, as when I wielded a flagon in yon hostelrie with ye. And prithee how fares *Lowfan Swartbacon*, the broad-bottomed nightingale, and *Yan Hacking-board*, the tippler?"

"Vel—all vel," replied Oosterwyk, smiling; "von zink all te tay—an' toder trink—an' botes vight like als duyvels! Maar—bote, mine coot yonker, voor vot man's vight you here?"

"I serve that invincible and most noble knight,

knight, sir Reginald de Travers," said Ralphe.

" Yaw vel! ane right coot—Duyvel's-baart en oogen!" exclaimed he, interrupting himself, and staring at the tall, stately figure of the friar, who at that precise moment emerged (like some gaunt spectre fleeing away before the light of day) from De Travers' tent. " Dare is dat lang olt man! dat breaching friar! vat voor koms he here? koms he te bray mit us? te gib us pader-nosders an' homilies voor our svorts. Cot—"

" Fear not," said Ralphe.

" Vear?" cried Oosterwyk, contemptuously—" Vear! dat is vel—Gerrit Oosterwyk vear? var is de hant can mak hem vear? maar— bote, mine coot yonker vriend, dar is mosh te vear vrom dit lang olt man. He deach braying in de blace of vighting. Inderdaad! Gerrit Oosterwyk vears dat man, voor he vights mit vorts an' afe mary's—an' Gerrit Oosterwyk vights mit de svort!"

" Nay,

“ Nay, prithee, good Gerrit, be not harsh in judging of that shaven crown. Though it seemeth mightily like unto a death’s-head, there is more good than guile in’t. And though his buckler be a psalter, and his sword a cross, he is a good warrior in the cause he serves—he fighteth the fiend wheresoever he finds him, and driveth him from his lurking-place; leaving corporeal and visible enemies to us soldiers, and waging war with the infernal and invisible with his own weapons.”

“ Yaw vel!” said Gerrit Oosterwyk, shrugging his shoulders, as if he regarded the friar’s services of very little importance compared to his own.

“ And moreover,” continued Ralphe, “ he hath a vast skill in leech-craft, and culls herbs and simples from the fields and woods for the healing of wounds—therefore we needs must own our obligation to the man who so kindly takes care both of our souls and our bodies.”

“ Yaw

"Yaw vel! dat is coot! dat is coot!" said the man of war, whose prejudices began to fade fast away before the explanation of Ralphe. "He is voort his vood an' his bay—dat is var bedder dan breach-ing."

"Why, truly, a good leech earns his feed and his pay—Yet wilt thou credit it —this lean friar will take nothing for his pains, but a cup of spring water, and a dole of black bread."

"Cot's truce!" exclaimed Oosterwyk—"vater an' pread!—no vlesh nor vine? Duyvels! dat is enuff te mak de boor man breach!"

"And yet methinks the like hard fare would breed more oaths than prayers in thine ungodly stomach—Gerrit, ey?"

The Fleming smiled, and nodded assent.

"Henceforth then look on this shorn friar as a goodly appendage to the tail of an army. And remember, though the king heads us in the fray, he kindly *heals* us after it!"

The

The calls of duty now separated the hardy Fleming, and the jocose, and not less brave Ralphe. And soon afterwards, Conrad Villiers and his men, having appeared in the field, every glaive was grasped, and every pike was levelled. For some minutes the hostile parties regarded each other in silence, evidently reconnoitring and comparing their respective forces. But the king was beyond all comparison the greater, and eager to disperse the rebels, Stephen was about to give the signal to charge, when a royal herald rode hastily towards the king, and proclaimed that a flag of truce had arrived from the castle. This circumstance appeared to create a general sensation of surprise among the barons.

“What, doth the traitor’s heart fail him?” cried the king. “Would he crave our pardon for his offences? Quick—bring his herald hither, and let us learn his message.”

The herald, bearing the flag, appeared
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in sight, and rode up the ranks towards the king, followed by five other horsemen, saluted by loud cheers from every warrior as they passed.

“What mean these demonstrations of joy?” demanded the king in utter astonishment, in vain seeking in the equally wondering faces of his barons for an explanation; but as they approached nearer, the mystery was solved.

“By the mass!” exclaimed sir William de Lacy—“my father! the baron de Lacy comes with them.”

“What means this?” said the king.

At the same moment the herald reined in his horse and saluted, while the four squires who accompanied the prisoner De Lacy, drew on either side, and the baron rode forward, loudly welcomed by Stephen and his brother barons.

The herald advanced:—

“Baron de Redvers greets the earl of Boulogne, and knowing the worth and good service of baron de Lacy, herewith returns

returns him without fee or ransom; for De Redvers scorns to deprive the weak man of his sword; but trusts that the earl will have the wisdom to use De Lacy in a better cause, and straitway withdraw from a contest which is hopeless."

"Audacious traitor!" exclaimed the king, exasperated at this galling taunt of De Redvers; then addressing the herald, he answered—"Go tell the base knight thou call'st thy master, we'll speak with him anon! ay, even within those walls, from whence he dares send forth such empty, boasting messages; for the which we'll whip him soundly with a rod of iron;" and motioning with his hand for the herald to depart, he turned towards the liberated De Lacy, who briefly related to him all that had passed since his capture—the mock urbanity and derision of De Redvers, and his subsequent release; and the latter action was by no means disagreeable to Stephen, however the manner of performing it might have chagrined him.

But

But there was little time to waste in words, when the bold display of hostility which was spread before their eyes called so loudly for chastisement; each leader therefore welcomed the sound of the signal-trumpet; and charging briskly forward, they were saluted by a shower of arrows and javelins from the enemy, who received their charge with unshaken firmness; and then, in the confusion and disorder into which the well-aimed javelins and long-shafts had thrown their assailants, they rushed in with sword, battle-axe, and bill, and the havock became general; not a sword was idle.

The redoubtable Conrad Villiers, clad in a suit of black-ringed mail, stained with the blood of his foe, was seen towering above his warriors, flying in every direction, cheering his followers with his Stentorian voice, and setting them an example by his dauntless bravery. Wherever he bent his course, he hewed his way with his two-handed sword, dealing death and de-

struction to all that opposed him : and notwithstanding the superiority of the king's force, and the no less distinguished courage of himself and his barons, Stephen found that Conrad rather gained upon, than flinched, from them. Neither were they so despicable an enemy as he had been led to imagine from the first report of their numbers, which, far from being exaggerated, fell short of the truth, for they had gathered additional strength in the course of their march.

William de Ypres, the bold leader of the Flemings, however was not idle ; and having observed an advantageous position on an eminence, which was kept by a band of skilful archers, who annoyed the horse by a continual and harassing discharge of their shafts, he directed his whole attention to that point, and with the aid of his brave comrades, and a trivial loss, drove them from the height, whereby he gained considerable vantage over the enemy, harassing them in the rear, and causing them a deplorable

a deplorable loss, which they were by no means able to sustain; at the same time their attention being called to the point they had so unfortunately lost, it naturally caused a diversion, which materially weakened the van of their army, turning the scale most obviously in favour of the king's troops, who hereupon pressed on with increased spirit, as they perceived them gradually yielding to their blows.

“On—on!” cried the valiant Stephen, who had played a conspicuous part in the fray, and was now animated with the favourable appearance which manifested itself in the fighting retreat of his opponents. Driving his spurs into the foaming sides of his plunging destrier, he dashed forward, throwing down all opposition, and slaying all who came within the deadly circumference of the mighty battle-axe he wielded.

The retreat now became more rapid, and the foe was evidently seeking the cover of the woods. Conrad Villiers was no

longer to be seen urging on his men to deeds of noble daring. Stephen sought in vain for the valiant leader of the flying army, who still fought bravely while they fled, covering the retreat of the rear.

In the ardour of pursuit, royalists and rebels were soon mingled, for the ranks were broken by the heavy charge, and the foe fought almost hand to hand, combatting in one grand and confused *mélée*.

The king however in the spirit of the charge, unfortunately discovered that his unbridled courage had carried him far beyond the bounds his cooler discretion would have permitted, for the dismayed numbers which yielded to him on his first irresistible onset, closed in upon, and assailed him on every side. He saw the dangerous error into which his impetuosity had led him; but he had advanced too far to retract, and therefore boldly defended himself against the assaults of those who multiplied in such numbers around him.

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In the heat of the battle his perilous situation passed unobserved by his followers, or else they were not able to distinguish him among the many who were fighting on the battle-field. But he preserved himself unharmed, keeping the circle, that surrounded him, at bay, wheeling about, until his heavy war-horse fell beneath him mortally wounded.

In this predicament all chance of averting his fate by the valour of his single arm, seemed hopeless; but the indomitable Stephen was determined to meet death bravely, and not unrevenged; and many were felled to the earth by his swinging blows, never more to rise. But, even at that moment, when he imagined himself inevitably lost, and cut off from all succour, a mounted warrior (who had probably witnessed his courageous struggle with his foes, and seen him fall), armed with bill and targe, loosed his rein, and leaped fearlessly among the combatants; and furiously spurring the spirit-

ed animal he bestrode, and reining him in at the same time, his desperate plunging threw down some, and trampled on others, for a moment causing those who hemmed in the king to draw back.

With the celerity of lightning the soldier dismounted, while the king as quickly vaulted into the saddle, and profiting by the panic, and taking advantage of the opening his deliverer had made, galloped out of the reach of danger, without casting a look behind him, till he again found himself surrounded by his knights ; nor could his searching eye discover in the mass before him any trace of the brave warrior who had flown so providentially and so fearlessly to his rescue ; and he felt pained in the reflection that he had probably fallen a victim to his loyalty.

His whole attention, however, was soon attracted to the movements of the rebels, of whom only an inconsiderable few appeared, still contending the field foot by foot, while the main body were lost in the thick

thick wood on their rear. The retreat, however, ultimately proved to be merely a concerted manœuvre to draw away the royalists from before the castle, where Conrad Villiers wished to gain admittance, and by this *ruse de guerre* he effectually gained his point; for while only a small part of his force bravely engaged the king, and kept up a running fight, Conrad, under cover of the thick wood, drew off the main body of his little army, and dexterously moved towards the castle, within whose impregnable walls he safely marched before the royalists could turn upon him, surprised and mortified as they were at the success of his stratagem. Immediately on the signal of their success being communicated to those few who still maintained with difficulty such an unequal fight, they fled precipitately, leaving the field to their duped conquerors, who were by no means pleased with the laurels they had won.

“ By God’s birth!” exclaimed Stephen,

“ the rebel hath truly cajoled us. He hath yielded the field for the fort. A cunning game well played, and to our especial loss. The castle was already strong enough, and by our lack of wariness, we have helped to add to it.”

All the barons assembled concurred with the king, that they had lost a material advantage, which would give new vigour to De Redvers, and protract the siege, or tend perhaps to baffle their utmost to subdue him.

De Lacy, who seldom or never yielded to the stream of general opinion, however strong, till his own reason had accurately examined and proved it just, listened with profound attention to all that was advanced, and then, with an air of the utmost diffidence, which he knew so well how to assume, and which invariably gained him the attention of his auditors, he spoke—“ All that your grace hath been pleased to say, as well as the concurrence of these your wise and able counsellors

counsellors in this affair, may be most true ; and who shall say the result ye fear shall not arrive ? But yet to mine eyes there doth appear no cause for grieving at the success of Conrad Villiers's manœuvre, inasmuch as I do consider by this accession that De Redvers is weakened ; for already had he sufficient strength within to keep us without from harming him. Nay, could he have parted with one half of his garrison, he would have done a wiser act than to give welcome to so many, who must needs prove unwelcome guests in the end—for they must feed, and so will they as surely undermine the main prop of his present power; for his opposition cannot be of much longer duration than his provisions. Therefore is his submission by his success accelerated. His friends will prove his greatest foes ; for they will bear famine with them, and work us a speedier victory !”

This view appeared so very plausible, that it received the general approbation of

the council; and at the same time that it soothed the apprehensions of the king, it exalted De Lacy in the estimation of his brother barons.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE policy of Stephen forbade him, under existing circumstances, to risk the loss of a single warrior in fruitless attacks upon the well-fortified castle of Exeter, which he now foresaw must eventually fall into his hands, as he had taken every precaution to prevent the approach of any emissary from his allies, or cut off any supplies wherewith any of De Redvers's auxiliaries might justly deem it necessary to dispatch to his aid.

This proceeding, however dilatory and wearying, opposed to the hasty and ardent spirit

spirit of the warrior, was nevertheless approved by judgment as the safest and surest mode of terminating the affair.

Meanwhile the royal party revelled in the abundance that flowed from many sources towards their camp, which exhibited more the smiling appearance of a carnival, than the frowning front of war. But even when seeming most incautious, they never forgot, in the enjoyments of festivity, that a foe was engirdled in their vast circle; their vigilance was unwinking and unrelaxed; and while the wine-cup was to their lips, the naked glaive glittered in their hands.

Stephen was indefatigable in enforcing the absolute necessity of the strictest watchfulness; and notwithstanding the confidence he placed in the co-operation of his barons, he rode from post to post several times in the course of the day and night, to be perfectly assured that all his commands were properly fulfilled; and as no one could calculate upon the precise

time of his going his rounds, as he purposely moved at different hours—at longer or shorter intervals, they were continually on the alert, thereby rendering it a matter of impossibility for a single soul to effect an escape from the castle by day or night, without detection. Thus hemmed in on all sides by a large army, who shewed no symptoms of again assailing the castle, De Redvers began at first to wonder at their supineness; and then, as the light of their real intentions gradually burst upon him, to tremble at the irremediable consequences which must necessarily ensue from their patient inactivity. For a long time he dared not to communicate his fears to those around him; but he was conscious that his fortunes were hourly arriving to that fatal crisis which would speak but too plainly for itself. A sharp sword hung suspended in fearful threat over his devoted head, and he found the strength of his arm paralyzed, and his buckler useless. The artifice of Stephen
was

was slowly sapping the life and vigour of his garrison, and he beheld with dismay that his strong castle would prove at last a tomb or a prison. To avert a blow so unexpected—so unforeseen, was utterly hopeless, for his enemy had cut off every chance of communication with those who might aid in extricating him from the perils of death and starvation, which glared appallingly upon him, which ever way he turned his despairing eyes.

As De Lacy had foretold, the worse than useless addition of Conrad's army became a grievous burden. De Redvers felt it, and turned over in his anxious mind some plan of quickly ridding himself of those who had, in their willingness to serve, only oppressed him. Pondering on his unenviable situation, he was walking on the ramparts, arm in arm with the redoubtable Villiers.

The sun was just setting—the sky shone bright and ruddy, and the departing rays gilded the dark green bosom of the woods, which

which fluttered and breathed in the cool breezes of a summer's eve, and gave to the few fleecy clouds which floated in the horizon the brilliant appearance of molten gold. It was indeed a gladdening sight, of such exquisite beauty and imposing calmness, that, looking on such a heaven, man could for awhile forget the petty troubles and wayward passions that are continually rebelling to disturb the peace and tranquillity of this earth, which else were paradise. But De Redvers felt not the benign influence of Nature's placid smiles. His eye was inward turned in fearful forebodings, and every thing around was clouded, dismal, and repulsive. His brow was knit in anxious thought, which was scarcely interrupted by the passing, trite, and shortly-answered observations of his bold ally, who began to wax weary of the confined and inactive life to which the policy of Stephen had doomed them.—“Look on those troops,” said he, pointing to the royal army, who surrounded them

them, and were amusing themselves at various warlike games and pastimes, “ how gaily they are disporting, while their blades are rusting in their scabbards for lack of use! Doth king Henry’s nephew wish to win us by this parade and show, think ye, De Redvers? Would he have us sheathe our swords, and quitting our hold, go play with him ?”

“ Play !” cried De Redvers, with a look of wildness and despair, laying his mailed hand firmly upon the arm of his companion ; “ his play, Conrad Villiers, is our destruction. The clashing of sword and buckler would be more harmonious than the joyful music of peace which is now sounding. My heart sinks within me, for their song of joy is our dirge.”

“ What meanest thou, De Redvers ?” demanded Conrad, to whom this speech appeared strange and incomprehensible. “ Wherein can Stephen’s fooling harm us ?”

“ In this—their feasting starves us.”

“ How ?

“ How? do we purvey for them?”

“ Nay,” replied De Redvers; “ nor can we for ourselves much longer. A day or two at farthest can elapse before we shall be destitute of every necessary.”

“ Ay—stands it so?”

“ ’Tis true—too true.”

“ And the consequences——”

“ Are obvious,” replied De Redvers.
“ This castle must be our tomb.”

“ What, die here?” exclaimed the fierce warrior, indignantly. “ ’Sdeath! think’st thou Conrad Villiers will die like a dog in his kennel? De Redvers, I came hither to aid thee; I drew my sword in thy cause, but I find it useless. Throw wide thy gates, therefore, and let us forth again. I will at least endeavour to carve a route through yonder lines; we may there, at the worst, meet an honourable death, while here an unrevenged, inglorious one awaits us.”

“ Thy number is so unequal to the force without,” said De Redvers, yet inwardly

wardly rejoiced at the prospect of his departure: and he knew, when once resolved, danger, however threatening it might appear, would rather give a spur to the spirit of the brave Conrad, than deter him from encountering it.

“They are few,” answered Conrad, proudly, “but they are firm.”

“But brave as they are, thou shalt not lead them on unaided. One hundred from my garrison will be proud to join so valorous a band, commanded by such a chief. Nay, in truth, thou must not deny me this. I shall retain a sufficient force to repel any attack that may be made.”

“Well, well—be it so,” said Conrad; “and now let’s hence, and speedily make preparation to depart.”

“To-night?”

“Even so; and, I trust, with the aid of my never-failing axe, to hew a passage through those trim lines; ay, even were they as stubborn and as numerous as the trees that grow around us. And when once

once I have safely cleared these barriers, I will speed me to arouse those whose hands seem not so ready as their tongues would teach us, in this cause. Meanwhile, hold out against the proud usurper, and in a few days I will bring up a sufficient force to succour thee. We must not let the champion fall, who hath stood so boldly forth, and loudly proclaimed those sentiments so many feel. The flag of defiance is unfurled, and we must not retract. Let us away, and prepare to sally forth at nightfall."

The courageous determination of Conrad Villiers thus happily relieved the desponding De Redvers; and hope pictured to him, in flattering colours, the fair prospect of a safe and speedy release from the galling bondage in which the superior policy of Stephen at present so securely held him.

The silent hour of midnight arrived. All was in readiness within the castle to put the desperate measures they had concerted

certed in execution. Unfortunately, however, the moon shone with resplendent brightness, and every object became almost as visibly distinct as in the broad glare of daylight.

But Conrad depended much on the security which Stephen appeared to place upon the superiority of his numbers and situation, and the improbability of any essay from the castle. He believed too, that the boldness of such an enterprise, and the sudden surprise it would occasion, would throw them into a confusion which would offer every advantage to facilitate his escape.

Having fixed on the point from whence he intended to issue (a small postern on the side of the castle which was in the shadow of the moon), he gave his final orders, and the strong barred gate was slowly opened.

Near this spot a party of Flemings were stationed, and among them Gerrit Oosterwyk,

wyk, Jan Hakkebort, and the musical Lou van Zwaartbeeken.

“ Vat sleeby togs deese repels are!” said Hakkebort; “ vy do dey niet kom oud an vight like als men? Ven dey starf an cod niet meer te pood in dere pellies, an be als din als pikestaffs, dey zal vight.”

“ Bah!” cried Oosterwyk, with a contemptuous sneer; “ de voools are plind.”

“ No madder, ’tis de bedder voor us—ist niet? yaw!” said Lou van Zwaartbeeken; “ do ve niet trink an zing, an zing an trink, an ead an ead? ’tis cood vight voor us, I dink,” and then he commenced singing in a loud voice—

“ Wyn! o edele wyn,
Die al de pyn

En zorg, van my terstond verdwynen doet,
Wat geef je my een hart vol moed!

Een stoop, twee, drie,
Maakt dat ik geen gevaar, hoe zwaar het is, outzie,
Noch vlie.”

“ Bah! holt your dong, Zwaartbeeken,” said Oosterwyk, “ your lout vois raddles t’rough de voods like als ane horn. Ve zal

zal pring de king atop on us bresently. Hah ! zilence ! ” continued he, in a suppressed tone, pointing towards the postern. “ Zie daar ! dere is zom duyvel’s verk dere ! —hah ! ane man kom oud—twee—drie—vier ! Brebare ! gib de zig-nal ! de vyand komt—plow de horn—brebare ! close order ! ”

All eyes were instantly directed towards the postern, from whence Conrad and his vassals presently rushed forth, and dashed courageously forward, with the impetuosity of some mountain stream, with the firm resolve of cutting through all opposition.

It happened at this juncture the king was going his ordinary rounds, with an escort of about fifty, composed of his bravest and staunchest knights, all mounted and armed for the combat, and hearing the loud blast of the signal horn, whose harsh notes broke on the sullen stillness of the midnight hour, and made the woods and welkin echo the discordant strain, the king pressed

pressed forward to the point of danger. In a few minutes the call to arms was answered from every quarter, and the troops came galloping in haste to strengthen the Flemings.

The athletic form of Conrad was soon descried at the head of his vassals; his black harness, strongly contrasted with his milk-white charger, and the snowy plumes which waved in his bacinet, shone conspicuously in the clear silvery light of the moon, which beamed brightly upon him as he emerged from the shadow of the castle. Meanwhile the king's troops kept pouring in on all sides, and soon formed a strong barrier to oppose his progress.

As they approached, Stephen remarked the gallant bearing of Conrad Villiers with a generous admiration, which well accorded with his martial spirit.—“ How proudly he bears upon us,” said he, “ as fearlessly as if his body were invulnerable, and his proud spirit scorned the opposition of our arms! but if this good faulchion fail

us

us not, with God's good will, we'll pluck that plumage from his crest, which now waves in haughty defiance to our power;" and herewith spurring on his courser, he rode gallantly forward to put his threat in execution.

The quick, dark eye of Conrad observed his approach, and immediately recognized his opponent—"Prince Stephen," cried he, tauntingly, and proud in his superior might, "thou had'st far better have slept safely in thy tent, than have ventured to oppose thy devoted head to the keen edge of Conrad's faulchion!"

"The young lion trembleth not at the voice of the fiercest boar of the forest!" replied Stephen. "I bear a faulchion too, and have an arm can wield it."

"Still would'st thou be wise to retreat before the impetuous band that follows at my heels, or thee and thine will presently be but as feathers on the waves of the sea!"

"Thou speakest bravely," replied Stephen; "but we have yet to try if thy skill
in

in arms as far exceedeth mine, as doth thy vaunting ;” and so saying, without farther parley, he aimed a blow, which the other dexterously caught upon his ringing targe, and at the same time swinging his battle-axe round his head, he vigorously attacked his noble antagonist, whose renown in arms he soon found was most justly his due. For notwithstanding the superiority of Conrad’s physical powers, and his gigantic stature, he found both might and skill baffled by the dexterity and quickness of Stephen’s movements, who managed his weapons and his well-trained steed with most admirable precision, striking, and wheeling, and turning about with such continual and indefatigable motion, that it put Conrad’s utmost cunning to the proof to defend himself, and keep his more agile enemy at bay : but in proportion as Stephen became every moment more and more aware of his equality, he grew more daring and hazardous, for as yet he had only exhibited his defensive and offensive tactics,

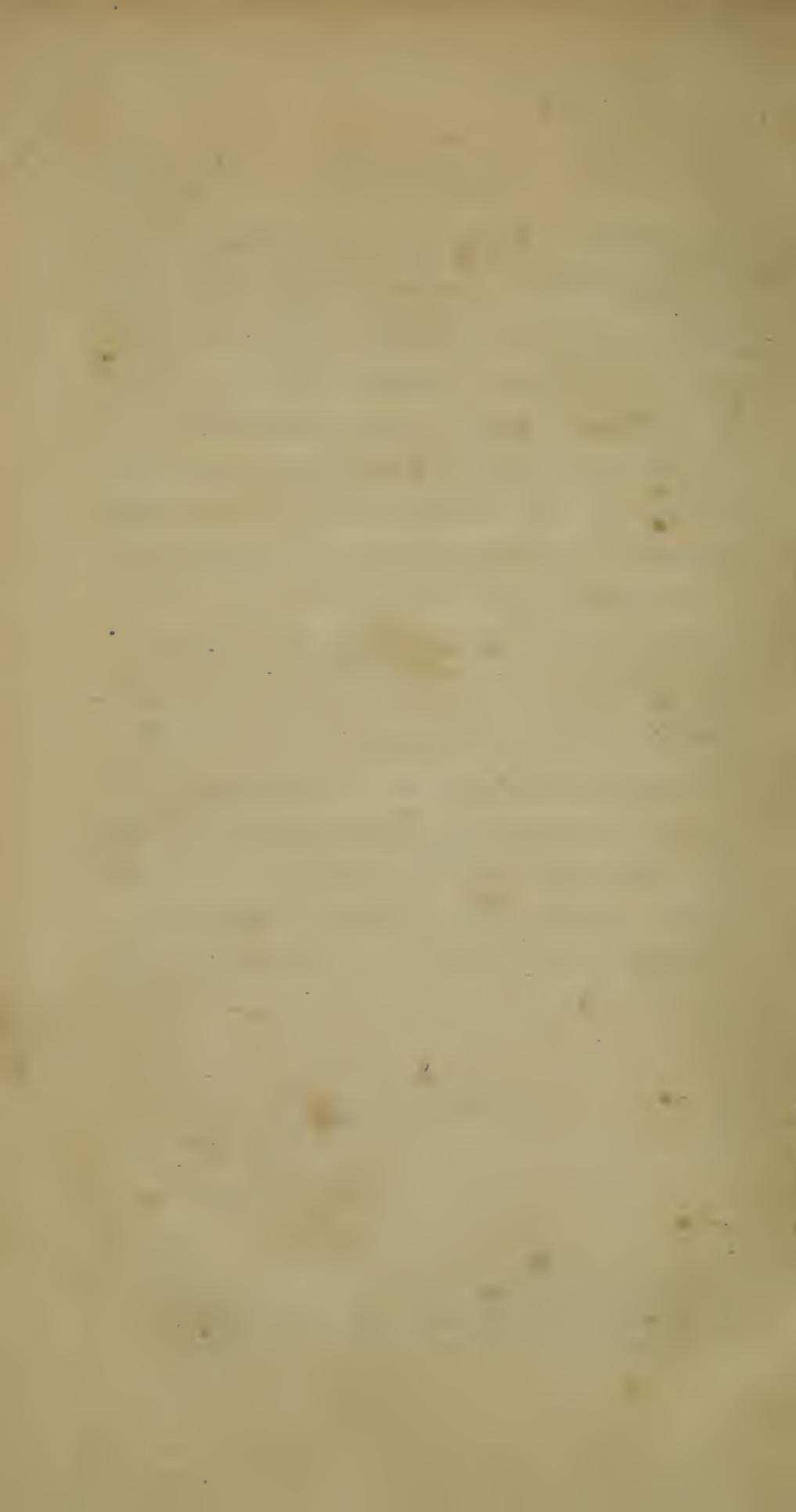
tactics, without gaining any material advantage over his opponent. Warmed with the exertion, while his courageous heart beat high with emulation, he pressed more closely on his valiant adversary, when, foiled in his aim, he received a heavy stroke from Conrad's faulchion, which split his shield in twain, and likewise considerably injured his left arm.

Furious at his failure, and this consequent discomfiture, he would probably have thrown himself, in the momentary desertion of his coolness, into unnecessary danger, if the impetuosity of Conrad had not suddenly turned the preponderating scale of chance in his favour. Elated with the effect of his staggering blow, Conrad eagerly spurred on his horse to the charge, to follow up his success, when, in the endeavour to wheel quickly round upon his foe, he threw the spirited animal upon his knees, and at the same instant the faulchion of the king, with the rapidity of lightning, rattled on his helm, and struck

him senseless to the earth. Hereupon those who had watched with feelings of the most intense interest, the fluctuating fortunes of this unequal conflict during its continuance, not daring to listen to their fears, or anger their prince by their interference, now galloped to the side of the conqueror, exultingly shouting—“Victory! victory!” and “long live king Stephen!”

While their gallant leader was engaged in the mortal combat we have attempted to describe, and wherein he bravely closed a glorious career of unequalled valour, his hardy followers were not idle in carrying his commands into effect; and notwithstanding the numbers opposed to them, they successfully achieved their purpose.

END OF VOL. I.



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